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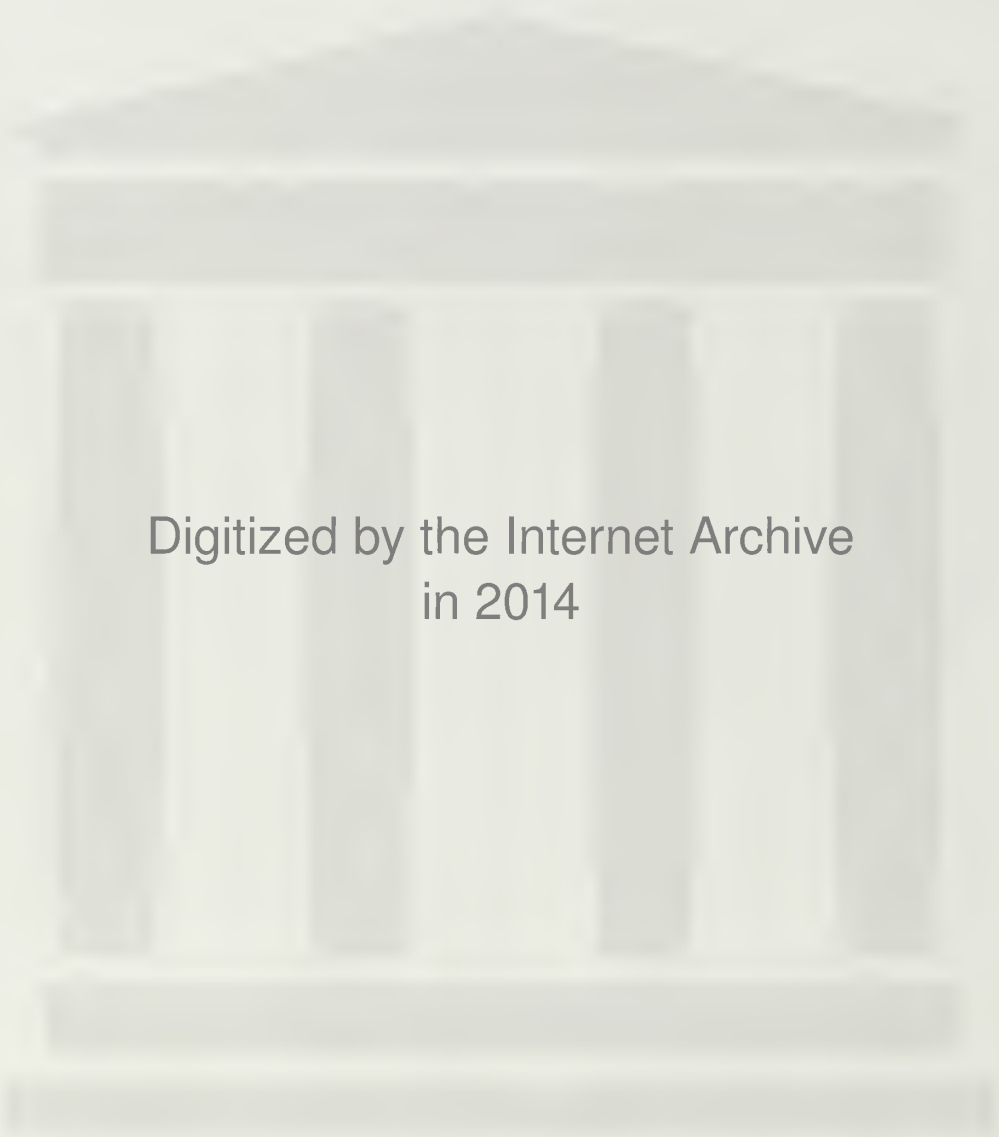
The politics and poetics of African American women's identity performances: (re) reading black hair in fictional/non-fictional writings and cultural productions/

Eunice Angelica Whitmal
University of Massachusetts Amherst



THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S IDENTITY PERFORMANCES: (RE) READING BLACK HAIR IN FICTIONAL / NON-FICTIONAL WRITINGS AND CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

A Dissertation Presented

by

EUNICE ANGELICA WHITMAL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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Approved as to style and content by:

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Esther M.A. Terry, Chair

_____

John H. Bracey, Jr., Member

_____

James Smethurst, Member

_____

Ann Ferguson, Member

_____

Esther M.A. Terry, Department Chair
W.E.B. Dubois Department of Afro-American Studies

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mother.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give thanks and praise to God, who is the head of my life, and who made completing this dissertation possible. While I alone bear the responsibility for the content in this dissertation, there were many who helped me during the process. I want to first thank my dissertation committee members: Professor Terry, Professor Bracey, Professor Smethurst, and Professor Ferguson. All have made contributions to my intellectual development and this project. I want to offer special thanks to my advisor, Professor Terry; thank you for your diligent hard work and your frank, constructive advice. Professor Smethurst, thank you for your critical eye, patience, and guidance. Professor Bracey, thank you for being a wealth of intellectual information, being supportive, and always offering to help without being asked. Professor Ferguson, thank you for always encouraging me, never doubting the importance of this work, or my intellectual abilities. Also, I want to thank the faculty, staff, and other students of the department of Afro-American studies for the support and resources that they provided while I was a student.

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ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S IDENTITY PERFORMANCES: (RE) READING BLACK HAIR IN FICTIONAL / NON-FICTIONAL WRITINGS AND CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

MAY 2007

EUNICE ANGELICA WHITMAL, B.A., LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

M.A., NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Esther Terry

This study considers how some African American women use their cultural production (e.g., fictional/non-fictional writings, films, prose, plays, comics, art, and music) to show how hair is central to their identity (re)construction. This study is multi-disciplinary in its approach, and uses paradigms from Afro-American studies, Black feminist thought, cultural studies, feminism, literary studies, and performance studies in order to investigate the ways that African American women (re)negotiate hair and identity politics in the world. An important aspect of this study is that for such women, hair is a part of their identity that has a performative dimension. Performance studies provides an alternative perspective that allows some scholars to contemplate African American women's hair politics and identities in a space of critical validation, self-reflexivity, and celebration. The selected works which I consider in this study utilize "natural" hair politics and identity performances that challenge derogatory images of African American women in an effort to present a more realistic and self-defined

(re)presentations of African American women and, in turn, deemphasize hegemonic ideas about aesthetics and identity.

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INTRODUCTION

This study considers how some African American women use their cultural production[1] (e.g., their fictional/non-fictional writings, films, prose, plays, comics, art, and music) to show how hair it is central to their identity (re)construction. It also explores how some African American women's use of hair as signifiers for, but not limited to, race, class, sexuality, and gender. Moreover, an important aspect of this study is that for such women, hair is a part of their identity that has a performative dimension. In such cases the cultural production that focuses on African American women's hair seeks to disrupt internalized gendered and racist notions [2] that white women are the standard of beauty. On the other hand, other African American women have rejected this notion of the aesthetic superiority of white women as the standard and have condemned even the act of African American women's straightening their hair as an act of self-hatred which produces performances of mental colonization or temporary madness that venerate whiteness as an aesthetic and identity and denigrates African American aesthetics and identities. In selected works which I consider in this study, the latter group of African American women discusses "natural" hair politics and identity performances that challenge derogatory images of African American women in an effort to present a more realistic and self-defined (re)presentations of African American women and, in turn, deemphasize white hegemonic ideas about aesthetics and identity.

This study is multi-disciplinary in its approach, and uses paradigms from Afro-American studies, Black feminist thought, cultural studies, feminism, literary studies, and performance studies in order to investigate the ways that African American women (re)negotiate hair and identity politics in the world. Performance studies, in particular,

provide an alternative perspective that allows some scholars to contemplate African American women's hair politics and identities in a space of critical validation, self-reflexivity, and celebration. I employ Margaret Drewal's definition of performance as the practical application of embodied skill and knowledge to the task of taking action.[3] Performance is the praxis of everyday life; every action taken by an individual is a performance. From this perspective, the body is a stage where hair and identity politics guide the performance. In his essay "The Social Skin," Terence Turner examines how humans refine their bodies in performance:

> The surface of the body, as the common frontier of society, the social self, and the psycho-biological individual, becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted and bodily adornment ...becomes the language through which it is expressed.[4]

Turner implies that the process of socialization is perhaps just as dynamic as one's performance of identity. In these instances, performance is an act of self-definition and transformation. Thus, performing an identity of one's choosing is a significant response to internalized gendered racism from African American women, whom others have attempted to define for so long. Their response is key because it foregrounds their dedication to defining themselves by challenging hegemonic beauty and identity standards. According to Derrida, a response is always a "response in deed, at work rather in the series of strategic negotiations ... response does not respond to a problem or question, it responds to the other—for the other."[5] Indeed, in this work, the 'response' to hegemonic beauty and identity representations is some African American women's (re) inventing new selves through their hair to their communities, to the world and to themselves. In other words, performance assists groups to (re)articulate their identity

within a society.[6] Kimberly W. Benston enables this understanding in Performing Blackness: Enactments of African American Modernism:

> Blackness ... (is)... a term of multiple, often conflicting, implications which, taken together, signal black America's effort to articulate its own conditions of possibility. At one moment, blackness may signify a reified essence posited as the end of a revolutionary "metalanguage" projecting the community toward "something not included here", at another moment, blackness may indicate a self-interpreting process which simultaneously "makes and unmakes" Black identity in the ceaseless flux of historical change.[7]

Benston's definition of the performative character of Blackness speaks to the dynamic nature of blackness.

I employ performance theory[8] within this study as a tool for explaining the dynamic nature of African American women's hair and identity politics without resorting to ethnic absolutism.[9] I argue that defining and controlling one's identity and representations of that beauty are significant goals of African American women in a world where they continue to be defined by negative (mis)representations produced by others. I also argue that some African American women use hair as a component in performing and maintaining what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as an "independent self-definition"[10] that is a powerful and essential resource to surviving in a racist and sexist society. I also focus on the ways in which African American women cope with the social, political, and economic inclusion and exclusion based on their hairstyle choices / performances.

Other theoretical approaches that I use in this study include Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, Michael Foucault's idea of "aesthetics of existence," and Jacques Lacan's three registers. Bakhtin defines the "carnivalesque" as the "grotesqueness" of an unfinished body that mocks the social order by inverting that

which has been elevated.[11] Bakhtin's theory of the "carnivalesque" has been useful as a vehicle for in this study exploring some African American women's facility for transgressive hair performances. For example, in some African American women's cultural productions, the chosen hairstyles illustrate a (re)conceptualization of hair and identity performances, and indicate an unwillingness to replicate a white female normative standard. In such cases these women (characters and authors) are performing (through their hair) in a carnivalesque manner and thus become transgressive figures that perform outside the dominant society's established cultural norms. In this dissertation, I argue that Bakhtin's "carnivalesque" is seen in transgressive characters like Celie and Shug in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, who offer via their hair and interpersonal relationships new ways of thinking about African American female identity politics, specifically as they relate to how their behavior and interactions challenge the social order of acceptable modes of heterosexual normative female performances. Susan Harding argues that counter-hegemonic posturing in the writings of women is viewed as an act of resisting male domination.[12] That is to say, the mere act of a woman's writing about herself and the challenges she encounters in the world is a form of resistance. I argue that the grotesque imagery in some African American women's writings and (re)presentations in popular culture is a way for these women to problematize and invert previous (mis)conceptions and (mis)representations about their hair and identity. In addition, I contend that the actual practice of writing is itself a performance that permits women to write themselves into existence in a world that devalues them.[13] Such grotesque performances are a release from the routines of daily life and the constraints it places on individuals.[14]

I also employ some of Michael Foucault's theories to explicate some of the fictional and non-fictional life writings examined in this study. I employ his theory of madness[15] to examine the production of straightening hair in Lorraine Hansberry's character Beneatha in "A Raisin in the Sun," Judy Scales-Trent in Notes of a White Black Woman, Aliona Gibson's Nappy: Growing up Black and Female in America, Marita Golden's Don't Play in the Sun. I argue that each of these women (the characters and in some instances the authors) present instances of self-mutilation that hide their features for social acceptance and embody the confinement that society provided for those deemed mad. Michel Foucault described this confinement as follows:

> Ultimately, confinement did seek to suppress madness, to eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find its place within it; the essence of confinement was not the exorcism of a danger. Confinement merely manifested what madness, in its essence, was: a manifestation of non-being; and by providing this manifestation, confinement thereby suppressed it, since it restored it to its truth as nothingness. [16]

I argue that under the lens of Foucault, Beneatha and others accepted that their natural hair has no value or beauty, hide it away, this is a form of confinement meted out to the "mad."[17]In some instances, through performing such acts as coloring one's hair blond, one might be thought to lessen, the an African American women's time in confinement or "undifferentiated experience"[18]

I also make use of Foucault's principle of "aesthetics of existence":

> What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.[19]

Here, Foucault focuses on analyzing self-improvement regimes of the ancient Greeks and Romans.[20] Her work was not written with contemporary applications in mind, particularly in the context of African American women's agency and identity politics during enslavement and indentured servitude. However, I make use of his concepts to demonstrate that, in servitude or enslavement, the act of writing transforms women like Wilson and Jacobs who have been restricted by racism and sexism. For them, the very act of writing is a catharsis that helps their bodies and minds to heal from the pain of their lived experiences and maintains their mental and physical health. I make use of this theory primarily in Harriet Wilson's Our Nig and Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl where I suggest that this principle leads these women to work to improve themselves. In this sense, I use Foucault's concept of "self care":

> The name of the ethical principle that leads people to cultivate themselves, that is to work to improve themselves. "This 'cultivation of the self' can be briefly characterized by the fact that one must 'take care of oneself.' It is this principle of the care of the self that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice. [21]

In the work of Wilson and Jacobs the "self care" displayed in their life writing illustrates that, while they were not completely autonomous agents, they attempted to circumvent the legal restrictions that limited their bodies, space, and identity performances. Thus, in this study Foucault's "self care" concept functions as oppositional politics for some oppressed African American women and their understanding of the power that informed their existence and performance in the world.

In this dissertation I employ Jacques Lacan's theories to examine the psychological development (e.g., fragmented and arrested) and identity performances of the African American women in the selected texts. For instance, I use his postulation that

one's subjective identity would be formed in three stages (or, "registers") of development: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. His postulate informs several of the fictional and non-fictional writings in this study. According to Lacan, the real stage (experienced before 6 months of age) comprises a primitive stage where the child's perceptions are filtered only through his / her senses without any censoring. Lacan's imaginary stage (6-18 months) comprises the stage where a child develops and uses images to form the ego. This stage includes the "mirror stage," where the child is first able to identify her / his reflection as an objective representation of herself / himself that is separate from both her / his actual person and her / his mother.[22] This (mis)recognition of self and subject / object dichotomy creates a gap or sense of lack, a fragmented self referred to by Lacan as an "hommelette."[23] I use Lacan's symbolic stage and the (mis)recognition in the mirror stage of the development to examine the work of Helga Crane and Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's novels Quicksand and Passing, Danzy Senna's novel Caucasia, and Rebecca Walker's autobiographical text Black, White, and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self.

I contend that African American women have used their hair to (re)construct, mask, perform and confine their identities in popular culture. In Unmarked: The Politics of Performance, Peggy Phelan examines photo-narratives captured by photographer Lorna Simpson in order to talk about how the Black female body is confined in society by racism and sexism.[24] I used Phelan's work to argue that the stigmata associated with African American women's hair reveals an internalized performance of self-hatred that causes many African American women to feel that they are masking their true identities and are confined by the dominant culture's stigmata about their hair. I further argue that

selected writings of African American women from the 1990s to the present serve to present counter-performances that liberate African American women from society's negative views of their hair and identity politics.[25]

Along with Phelan's work, I utilize the work of other feminist and Black feminist theorists in this dissertation to explicate texts. The works of Patricia Hill Collins, Ingrid Banks, Darlene Clark Hine, Claudia Tate, and bell hooks were particularly helpful because they led me to consider how some African American women have tendencies to adhere to externally derived standards of beauty that have led them to dislike their own skin color or hair texture.[26] Cultural critic bell hooks agrees with Collins's argument that Blacks suffer from internalized racism, but goes further (in a more positive light) by describing how the process of styling some African American women's hair causes bonds to develop among the women present.[27] I use the work of Collins and hooks to consider and contemplate issues such as identity, community, consciousness, femininity, subjectivity, and access to resources as they pertain to the subject of hair. I use Black feminist theory[28] to argue that African American women's writings and (re)presentations of hair politics in popular culture could be viewed as counternarratives to the dominant culture's negative (mis)representations of African American women. Finally, I use Black feminist theory to explore the notion of African American female identity (history and real world consequences notwithstanding) as a construct, which can be redefined and reconstructed via performance and the grotesque.

This project involved an examination of African American women's novels, plays, poems, essays, life writings and popular culture (advertisements, films, performance art, photography, television, and music videos) through the prism of

performance studies discourse, Black women's social history, feminism, Black feminism/and or womanism, and literary theory and criticism discourse. It is important to note that this work does not intend to be an exhaustive study on popular culture. However, I devoted a chapter to examining the contemporary representations in popular culture as it relates to African American women's hair and identity politics. This study finds that of the African American women's cultural productions examined in this work, most of the African American women produced (re)presentations that functioned as counter narratives and images to antagonistic (mis)presentations produced within and outside the African American culture. This study also finds that in rare instances where white female hair standards were replicated, it was done to illustrate that the author had in fact suffered internalized gendered racism, to gain access to resources (e.g., employment), and highlighted this tension to show that the pervasiveness of such oppression on their performance and identity politics.

Literature Review

Scholars have lent their voices to the ongoing discussion of the politics of African American women's hair from fields as varied as art (Bill Gaskins), black studies (Ingrid Banks), cultural studies (bell hooks, Kobena Mercer, and Jacqueline Bobo), Literature (Henry Louis Gates), feminist studies (Angela Davis and Gloria Wade-Gayles), History (Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Noliwe Rooks, Robin D. G. Kelley, Orlando Patterson and Bruce Tyler), performance (Ntozake Shange), psychology (Margo Okazawa-Rey), and sociology (Patricia Hill-Collins and Maxine Craig). Recent writings by Rose Weitz, Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Maxine Leeds Craig,[29] Ingrid Banks, Kathy Peiss, and Noliwe M. Rooks have also focused on Black women's hair, identity, and representation politics.

Weitz's Rapunzel's Daughter[30] is an examination of women's hair and its role in representational politics from the Middle Ages to the present. Weitz presents interviews and conversation with a number of young girls and women, framed within a historical context. Weitz uses these interviews (combined with her personal experiences) to show that hair is a means that women of various backgrounds use to perform their identity to the world. Similarly, Maxine Leeds Craig's ethnographic study Ain't I a Beauty Queen[31] examines how hair and beauty contests are modes of articulation of African American female identity. Craig's subjects discuss and reflect on representations of Black beauty and hair politics and the ways these representations affect their self-images. For example, during one interview Craig asks an older African American woman what it meant to wear an Afro in the 1960s and the woman claimed that "it totally says how old we are."[32] In this sense, Craig's participant illustrates how for some African American women the Afro's political importance lessened over the years. Craig also complicates the notion that straightened hair only indicates self-loathing:

> Straightened hair represented access to hair products, sanitation, leisure, and relative prosperity. A woman who put time and money into her appearance was dignified, and her dignity spoke well of her race. Grooming was a weapon in the battle to defeat racist depictions of blacks.[33]

Craig's observations demonstrate how some African American women used their hair to negotiate and navigate a racist and sexist society.

Ingrid Banks' ethnography Hair Matters also analyzes interviews of African American women of various ages. Her study focuses on generational differences in the attitudes of younger and older Black women regarding issues of race, gender, beauty and power, and their reflections on hairstyle choices and politics. A recurring theme in her

interviews is the contrast between "good" and "bad" hair, a dichotomy that actively engages the psyches of her subjects.[34] Banks argues that an African American woman's decisions about her hairstyle determines who she is and how others will see her, and contends that African American women feel more empowered when they are in control of their choices and of the meaning inscribed on their hair. In this manner, Banks study is valuable because it reveals how some African American women theorize, in their own words, how hair impacts their identity politics and performance.

Recent historical work has focused on African American beauty culture from both the consumer's and provider's perspectives. Historian Kathy Peiss examines mass-market beauty commerce in Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture.[35] Peiss discusses how hair and beauty products assisted both white and African American women in constructing new aesthetic and professional identities. Peiss focuses on the desires of some African American women to purchase hair and beauty products, as well as the desires of some white males, such as Abe Plough of Plough Chemical Company, to secure the business of African American patrons by misrepresenting their racial identities. Peiss also details how the white owners of Golden Brown Chemical Company successfully convinced patrons that the company's products were invented by "Madam Mamie Hightower," a fictitious African American founder and owner. Golden Brown advertised in African American newspapers in an effort to legitimate their "African American" business.[36] In contrast, Noliwe M. Rooks explores African American women's attempts to establish a Black female aesthetic through hair care advertisements in Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women.[37] Specifically, Rooks compares the advertisement strategies of both African American hair care magnates

(including Madam C.J. Walker and Annie T. Malone) and white-owned hair care companies that implied that their products would change the user's hair texture and make them more acceptable to the dominant culture. Rooks points out that advertisements like Walker's helped some African American women care for their hair without embracing white female aesthetics as a template of beauty for her perspective patrons. She notes, however, that other hair care advertisements directed at African American patrons were more critical:

> The advertising copy for hair straighteners is equally disparaging. Before treatment, African American hair is referred to as kinky, snarly, ugly, and curly. The language shapes or constructs that community as forever trapped by its circumstances and imprisoned by its features. Because all of these advertisements derive their significance from the racial ideologies that undergird them, the meaning of African American women's bodies pictured in the advertisements is solely articulated within that construct. It is at the level of their bodies that the rationale for changing or disavowing an African ancestry is articulated.[38]

Rooks argues that such negative rhetoric could prompt some African Americans to create and sell hair care products to African American women in the framework of more positive and uplifting representations. Such women are examined in Julia Kirk Blackwelder's Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation,[39] a historical survey of the business of training prospective African American hairdressers in racially segregated areas from World War I to the 1960s. Blackwelder presents a detailed exploration of future hairstylists, particularly African American beauty school managers and teachers James H. Jemison and Marjorie Stewart Joyner. Blackwelder meticulously shows how Jemison and Joyner prepared African American women (who were excluded from white schools of cosmetology) for career opportunities that would steer them away from factory and domestic work and allow

them to have greater economic independence and control over their lives.[40] Blackwelder shows the influence of representational politics of many African American women in segregated communities when she claims that "carefully groomed hair and immaculate dress armed women against the arrows of racial insults."[41] In addition to providing social and civil mobility, Blackwelder's study shows how Jemison and Joyner's African American training schools and salons provided a space that shielded some African Americans from the indignities of racism, helped some African Americans open hair salons without the financial assistance of whites, and used hair as a means to contribute to religious and racial uplift through beautification.[42]

The work of Weitz, Blackwelder, Craig, Banks, Peiss, and Rooks is valuable because it looks at the importance of representation of Black women's hair in identity politics and leans toward socio-historical readings. This study will also examine literary works within a historical framework, especially in Chapter 2 where two seminal historical literary texts are analyzed.

This study offers new readings and interrogations of selected African American women's cultural productions to demonstrate how some African American women's hair is critical to their identity performances.

NOTES

[1] In this work, my use of the term cultural production refers to the means through which we come to learn and understand people, images, and resources. My understanding of this term is informed by the following: Liz Gordon, "Paul Willis: Education, Cultural Production, and Social Reproduction," British Journal of Sociology and Education 5.2 (1984): 105-115; Mae G. Henderson, "Where, by the Way, Is This Train Going?: A Case for Black (Cultural) Studies," Callaloo 19.1 (1996): 60-67.

[2] Here I am using Obiagele Lake's definition of internalized gendered racism. Lake claims that internalized gendered racism happens when members of an oppressed group internalizes myths, negative ideas, and stereotypes about their group. Moreover,

the physical appearance of said individuals is included in this development. See Obiagele Lake, Blue Veins and Kinky Hair: Naming and Color consciousness in African America (Westport: Praeger, 2003) 81. Additionally, Claudia Tate asserts that some, but not all, African Americans admire "selected white cultural artifacts" like beauty/hair standards. See Claudia Tate, Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race (New York: Oxford, 1998) 204.

[3] Margaret Drewal, "The State of Research on Performance in Africa," African Studies Review 34.3 (1991):1-64.

[4]Terence S Turner, "The Social Skin," Reading the Social Body, eds., Catherine B Burroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993) 112.

[5] Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," trans. Ruben Beresdivin, Reading Levinas, eds., Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[6] Drewal 1.

[7]Kimberly W Benston, Performing Blackness: Enactments of African American Modernism (New York: Routledge, 2000) 3-4.

[8] Here I understand performance theory to be the supposition used by scholars to illuminate meaning and explicate ritualized behavior conditioned/ permeated in society. Richard Schechner, one of the leading theorists in the field of performance studies, asserts that the term "Performance Theory" first appeared in 1977, as "Essays on Performance Theory 1970-1976" published by Drama Book Specialists of New York." See Richard Schechner, Performance Theory (New York: Routledge, 2003) xiii. For more detailed discussions of how performance studies scholars use theoretical materials with practical experiences in both participating in and observing the procedures of performing see the following: Marvin Carlson, Performance: A Critical Introduction (London: Routledge, 1996); Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1959); Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," The Drama Review 46: 2 (2002): 146-7, and Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York: Performing Arts Journal Press, 1982).

[9]Here, I am borrowing from Keith Negus' idea of "ethnic absolutism," that refers to an authentic and unchanging racial self. Such views support reductive and essentialist thinking that does little to show the complexity of African American's identities. A rejection of such thinking promotes a space for new African American identities to be performed. See Keith Negus, Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996) 105-107.

[10] Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1991) 93.

[11]Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[12] Susan Harding, ed., Feminism and Methodology (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[13] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) 108-115.

[14] Kevin Hetherington, Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics (London: Sage Publications, 1998) 147.

[15] Madness, according to Michel Foucault, pertains to "undifferentiated experience." He describes the mad as blind (dazzled) and unable to see the truth of life. The mad are seen as inhuman and troublesome and eventually gathered up from their wanderings and are later confined. For my purposes I liken oppressed African Americans, women in particular, to Foucault's "confined" mad individuals. See Michel Foucault, trans. Richard Howard, Madness and Civilization (New York: Pantheon, 1965) ix-108.

[16] Foucault 116.

[17] Foucault 116.

[18] Foucault ix.

[19] Michel Foucault, trans. Robert Hurley, Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality (New York: Random House, 1986).

[20] Foucault (1986) 10-11.

[21] Foucault (1986) 43.

[22] Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977)5-7.

[23] A play on words, denoting both "little man" and a meal made from broken eggs.

[24]Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: The Polities of Performance (New York: Routledge, 1992) 158.

[25] It is important to reiterate that some African American women have produced writings that functions as counternarratives prior to the 1990s to the present. See, for example, the upcoming chapters in this study.

[26]Collins 80.

[27]Collins 81.

[28] I make use of Deborah McDowell's definition, where she states: "I use the term here simply to refer to Black female critics who analyze the works of Black female writers from a feminist political perspective. But the term can also apply to any criticism written by a Black woman regardless of her subject or perspectives book written by a male from a feminist or political perspective, a book written by a Black woman or about Black women authors in general, or any writings by women." See Deborah McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," The Changing Same" Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 10.

[29] Several books on African American women's hair, by non academics, have been published recently. See Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, Hair Story: Untangling The Roots of Black Hair in America (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001) and Juliette Harris and Pamela Johnson, Tenderheaded: A Comb-Bending Collection of Hair Stories (New York: Pocket Books, 2001).

[30] Rose Weitz, Rapunzel's Daughter : What Women's Hair Tells Us About Women's Lives (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004) xii.

[31] Maxine Leeds Craig, Ain't I a Beauty Queen: Black Women, Beauty, and the Polities of Race (New York: Oxford, 2002) 160.

[32] Craig 160.

[33] Craig 35.

[34]Ingrid Banks, Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 28.

[35]Kathy Peiss, Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

[36] Peiss 117-118.

[37] Noliwe M. Rooks, Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

[38] Rook 35.

[39] Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

[40] Blackwelder 3.

[41] Blackwelder 6.

[42] Blackwelder 147-154.

CHAPTER I

HAIR AS A TROPE FOR RACE, CLASS, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN HARRIET WILSON'S *OUR NIG* AND HARRIET JACOBS' *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL.*

> The subject of Black women's physical beauty occurs with such frequency in writing the writing of Black women that it indicates that they have been deeply affected by discrimination against the shade of their skin and the texture of their hair. In almost every novel and autobiography written by a black woman, there is at least one incident in which the dark-skinned girl wishes to be either white or light skinned with good hair. [43]

As Mary Helen Washington notes, many African American women have used their fictional and non-fictional writings as spaces from which explore the details and tapestry of their lived experiences. The details of an individual's life may further assist in enriching the audience's concept of history and literature, and thus their notions of selfhood.[44] Indeed, fictional and non-fictional life writing illuminates how African American women's lives can be (re)presented (in the process of writing) and how the historical and literary self is performed.[45] Some African American women's fictional and non-fictional life writings include discussions about the politics and performance (forced/voluntary) of hair and identity. Two works are central to these discussions: Harriet Wilson's Our Nig[46] and Harriet Jacobs' (pseudonym Linda Brent) Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.[47] In this chapter, I argue that both of these nineteenth century texts demonstrate how African American women's hairstyles function as tropes for race, class, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, I contend that some hairstyles allow some African American women to (re)conceptualize and perform aspects of their identity. Finally, in this study, I will use Michel Foucault's concept of self care to help explicate these women's life writings. [48]

In the 19th century, many enslaved African women resisted oppression by refusing to work, engaging in sabotage, or, on the rare occasion, running away.[49] Another mode of resistance for some African American women was learning how to read and write,[50] despite its being obligated to do so, (which was against the law) and writing their autobiographies. Their writings in a predominantly white-male-centered genre[51] distinguished them as individuals and established identities for them that were separate from the slave identity conferred on them by white society.[52] Their works were also used by abolitionists to underscore the abolitionist demand that slavery be abolished. These autobiographies also allowed their authors to display what Michel Foucault terms self care: the focus on large-scale existential concerns such as to how to keep one's body healthy, or how to live an ethical life.

Foucault's approach to self care focuses on analyzing self-improvement regimes of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and was not written in a context of servitude or enslavement. I argue, however, that the act of writing is an act of self-care for women like Wilson and Jacobs who have been enslaved and restricted. For them, the very act of writing is a catharsis that helps their bodies and minds to heal from the pain of their lived experiences[53]and maintain their mental and physical health.[54] Their stories also allow them to act ethically by raising public consciousness about the vicious plight of enslavement and indentured servitude in both the North and the South, and elicit sympathy for the cruelty and sexual exploitation endured by some of the women. Their stories render women who have historically been rendered invisible, visible[55] and express their desires for a more inclusive society.[56] This application of Foucault's self care concept will be further explored at another place in this study.

The visuality of African Americans has long since been the instrument that by inversion has defined whiteness as the foundation for racial classification and stratification in America. For many African American women, their hair is a highly visible feature that they can use to (re)define and perform an aspect of their identity.[57] Harriet Wilson's "sketches" from her semi-autobiographical[58] novel Our Nig focus on the issue of racial classification and, in the process, reveal much about agency, identity, and racial and gender oppression as they relates to hair from the point of view of her heroine, Frado.[59] Frado is the fair-skinned, curly haired daughter of a white female indentured servant, Mag Smith, and Jim, her African American husband living in the North. Here, Frado's hair is a sign of her racial heritage. Frado's heritage becomes a burden to Mag Smith when she marries Seth Shipley (a white man) and they prepare to seek employment in other towns. For example, when Mag and Seth discuss where they should leave her mixed race children, Mag asks:

> Who'll take the black devils? snarled Mag. "They're none of mine," said Seth: "what you growling about?" "Nobody will want any thing of mine, or yours either," she replied. "We'll make'em, p'r'aps," he said. "There's Frado's six years old, and pretty, if she is yours, and white folks'll say so. She'd be a prize some where," he continued, tipping his chair back against the wall, and placing his feet upon the rounds, as if he had much more to say when in the right position. [60]

In this passage Mag and Seth both agree that no one will want Frado because of her racial heritage. Seth attempts to soften Mag's situation by pointing out how Frado "looks" white, but when he states that Frado would be a "prize somewhere" and gives the impression that he expound more if he was in the "right position." Seth's abrupt slipping into silence might be an indication that he knows that there is no one in their town that would see Frado as white, regardless of her fair skin and "long, curly black hair," because

her father was African American and many in the town viewed their union with repulsion.[61] The realization of this is evident when Mag leaves Frado in the employ of Mrs. Bellmont, a mean-spirited, racist white woman, while traveling to find employment.

One source of tension between Mrs. Bellmont and Frado is Frado's skin and hair. As a mulatto with fair skin, Frado's appearance distorts the racial boundary between her and Mrs. Bellmont. In one of several attempts to reinforce Frado's performance as an African American, Mrs. Bellmont refuses to allow Frado to wear any protective coverings on her head while working outside in the sun.[62] By taking this action, asserts Lois Leveen, Mrs. Bellmont invokes Frado's "class difference to increase the mark of her racial difference and lessen the ambiguity of her position in the household and her status as a female of mixed race".[63] Mrs. Bellmont also finds Frado's hair troublesome because it enhances her beauty---beauty that does not go unnoticed by Mrs. Bellmont's son, Jack.[64] Jack's attention to Frado disturbs Mrs. Bellmont, and prompts her (as was the custom) to attempt to control Frado by controlling her body.[65] Mrs. Bellmont subsequently cuts Frado's hair an act that does not go unnoticed:

> "Where are your curls Frado?" asked Jack, after the usual salutation. "Your mother cut them off." "Thought you were getting handsome, did she? Same old story, is it; knocks and bumps?[66]

Jack's response helps Frado come to understand that her hair was one aspect of a performance as a beautiful and desirable woman. I argue that this attention likely contributes to Frado seeing herself as more than a servant. [67] If she does see herself as an individual, and an attractive one at that, Frado does not offer a reply to Jack's compliment. There are several plausible reasons for her silence. First, Frado's silence can be interpreted as an instance of self care. That is to say, as a servant whose

"employer" has abused her, Frado could not risk Mrs. Bellmont's hearing that she had responded favorably to the kind words of Jack. Likewise, Frado could not risk Jack's thinking that she was possibly making herself available to him sexually because she responded favorably to his comment. Furthermore, Frado's silence allows her to protect her body from additional beatings and verbal abuse. In this sense, Frado's silence also echoes Darlene Clark Hine's theory of the culture of dissemblance:

> By dissemblance I mean the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors. [68]

Thus, Frado's silence allows her to both appear accommodating and agreeable to the entire Bellmont clan and to quietly and slowly produce self respect in a space deep within her private self. I also contend that Frado's silence reflects the impact of Mrs. Bellmont's physical and verbal abuse Frado's sense of herself. Frado comes to see her identity as that of an inferior servant when Mrs. Bellmont cuts her hair (a marker of punishment for an indentured servant or slave). [69]

During times of indentured servitude and enslavement, the hair cutting of African Americans by whites (especially women) was not uncommon.[70] The act of cutting the hair of enslaved/indentured servants became a form of punishment and, in essence, a refusal to acknowledge African American selfhood--a way to mark their perceived inferior status. This operation also functioned as a performative ritual similar to the more deadly one of lynching:[71] both involve mutilating the body to punish and amuse others, and to reinstate white superiority.[72] Wilson's inclusion of the hair cutting incident, while not as tragic as a lynching, does point to an attempt by whites to control her body. Prior to the hair cut, Frado's long hair functions as a trope for femininity and beauty, and this

troubles Mrs. Bellmont because she does not want Frado's appearance (her light skin and long curly hair) to link her in any way to the social and moral status of a white woman.[73] On this status, artist and theorist Lorraine O'Grady writes,

> The female body in the West is not a unitary sign. Rather like a coin, it has an obverse and reverse: on the one side, it is white; on the other, not-white or, prototypically, black. The two bodies cannot be separated, nor can one body be understood in isolation from the other in the West's metaphoric construction of "woman". White is what woman is; not-white (and the stereotypes not-white gathers in) is what she had better not be.

What is clear from O'Grady's argument is that in order for Mrs. Bellmont to perform as an "authentic" white woman she must assure even the causal observer that she and Frado are not the same. By cutting Frado's hair, Mrs. Bellmont also further forces Frado to perform as "other"—African American female.[74] Mrs. Bellmont wants to be certain that Frado's hair does not allow her to present a performance that could be misread as white, and that she is aesthetically and racially inferior to Mrs. Bellmont, her daughters, and white women in general. Frado is presumed inferior, both because of her race[75] and because Frado believes she is truly inferior.[76] The hair cutting accentuates Frado's "African Americanness" and gives her a boyish appearance and insures that Frado is unable to perform as an attractive white woman.

In the end, Frado's short hair appears to have little or no power or aesthetic currency according to the dominant culture's standard of beauty.[77] Jack's interest in Frado also calls attention to race as a trope for sexual behavior and exploitation. The topic of sexual exploitation of African American women was not uncommon in life writings. Gerda Lerner asserts:

> By assuming a different level of sexuality for all Black than that of whites and mythifying their greater sexual potency, the black woman could be made to personify sexual freedom and abandon. A myth was created that

> all black women were eager for sexual exploits, voluntarily "loose" in their morals, and, therefore, deserved none of the consideration and respect granted to white women. Every black woman was, by definition, a slut according to this racist mythology; therefore, to assault her and exploit her sexually was not reprehensible and carried with it none of the normal communal sanctions against such behavior. A wide range of practices reinforces this myth: the laws against interracial marriage; the denial of the title "Miss" or "Mrs. "to any black woman; the taboos against respectable social mixing of the races… [78]

Significantly, the myth of African American hyper female sexuality is never explicitly addressed in Wilson's work. In fact, when Frado directly discusses sexuality it is that of Frado's white mother, of dubious virtue, whose status as a white woman was irrevocably comprised when she marries an African American man and has his baby.[79] This exclusion of a discussion of her own sexuality leaves the door open to the possibility that Frado might have been sexually exploited by one, if not all, of the Bellmont men.[80] That is to say, Jack Bellmont's attention to Frado's hair and her state might be the very thing she is referring to when she states that some things were too painful to write about. Perhaps Wilson uses the hair cutting incident as a way to suggest that she might have been sexually abused. While Wilson never states directly that Frado has been sexually exploited, she does reveal in the preface that she does not

> … pretend to divulge every transaction in my own life, which the unprejudiced would declare unfavorable in comparison with treatment of legal bondmen; I have purposely omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home.[81]

What could have been so shameful in Frado's experience as a servant for the Bellmont family that it could not be disclosed? Here, I propose that one of the unspeakable shameful acts Frado endured was that of being raped by one of the Bellmont men. The experience of being sexually exploited was one that many "free" African American

women servants suffered.[82] If this sexual exploitation occurred and Mrs. Bellmont became suspicious of it, she might cut Frado's hair both as a means of punishment and as a means to decrease Frado's beauty.

Frado's new haircut is a sign with multiple modes of interpretation.[83] With her hair short, Frado visually performs simultaneously as a "Negro woman" and a masculine. In this sense, the haircut becomes a mode for the reinforcement of African American gendering, and for Frado this means being asexual or deemphasizing her female sexuality. Norman Fairclough asserts that this notion of style and appearance relates to the performance of identity:

> Styles are the discoursal aspect of ways of being, identities, who you are is partly a matter of how you speak, how you write, as well as a matter of embodiment—how you look, how you hold yourself, how you move and so forth[84]

Fairclough's assertion highlights the imposed performative aspects of Frado's new style. In this sense, Frado's performance demonstrates how she is forced via her haircut to reinvent herself. The intent of the hair cut---this forced expressive form—is meant to make her less visible and desirable. Thus, with her new haircut, Frado chooses to act passively, which is part of her identity performance.[85] The haircutting assisted in not merely representing identity, but also in producing it. This performance requires that Frado takes some stand (passive or active), such as a normative one (considering existing traditions) or a transgressive[86] one (contravene for racial and gender boundaries).

Frado's new haircut also serves as a means of subverting what Mrs. Bellmont construes as a phallic symbol. That is to say, Mrs. Bellmont sees Frado's long hair as a source of power for Frado to attempt to control her own life. This is power that Mrs. Bellmont can not let Frado exercise, and by cutting Frado's hair, renders Frado with

symbolically and aesthetically powerless. What I am asserting here is that Mrs. Bellmont might interpret Frado's "white looking" skin and long hair as tools Frado might use to alter her situation and status in the Bellmont home. Thus, in order to destabilize the assumed phallic/power of her long hair, it must be cut—producing a form of castration. The notion of African American female castration is delicately explored in Lorraine O'Grady's essay "Olympia's Maid."[87] O'Grady writes,

> the non-white woman is castrata and whore . . . [her] place is outside what can be conceived of as woman. She is the chaos that must be excised, and it is her excision that stabilizes the West's construct of the female body, for the femininity of the white female body is insured by assigning the non-white to a chaos safely removed from sight. Thus, only the white body remains as the object of a voyeuristic, fetishing, male gaze. The non-white body has been made opaque by a blank stare.

O'Grady's polemic illustrates a significant point. First, Mrs. Bellmont's cutting of Frado's hair marks Frado and in doing so, permits Mrs. Bellmont the opportunity to experience the limited empowerment typically reserved for white men. In this sense Mrs. Bellmont has control over and access to Frado's African American female body to exploit as she sees fit. Indeed, Mrs. Bellmont's cutting of Frado's hair further marks Frado as obscure in her son's eyes and hopefully the eyes of other men. By the end of Wilson's narrative, Frado does manage to leave the controlling Mrs. Bellmont, which departure from servitude is liberating,[88] the ultimate example of liberation is in her performance of self through her writing and the belief that the audience will understand her need to (re)construct herself[89] in writing. Of this endeavor Warwick Wadlington asserts of the writer and their audiences:

> Human beings are biologically incomplete and, without culture, helpless animals who become capable persons, and *continue* to become capable persons, by enacting personae selected by imitation from the repertoire

> offered by their culture and social structure. But the repertoire exists only within the specific varying performances of others, imprinted with their particular styles and "accents." All, then, are engaged in concrete, mutually shaped enactments in a complex dialogue with others as well as with their own already acquired internalized roles. One simultaneously becomes and influences others to become a confederation of persons by "trying on," selecting, and habituating oneself to roles. In this actively seeking, evaluative, and self-defensive process of becoming and reproduction, no one identity, "voice," can be duplicated exactly. All are handed on to another, to the degree they are, in forms transmuted by idiosyncratic accents. As in sexual reproduction, identity in its transmission is mediated and thereby modified by another.[90]

I suggest that Wadlington's assertion illuminates how Frado's semi-autobiographical novel facilitates certainly care of self, certainly, but is also a means to perform an identity of her choosing and construction.

Wilson addresses her African American audience on the complex subject of racism in the "free" North. Her work is a shrewd reminder that the North is not as safe a harbor for African Americans as they might have imagined. Wilson's work also underscores how the African American female body is a battleground of intersectional politics, and highlights the issues of the performance of power and individualism and interpersonal relationships between the races and women. Indeed, Wilson's work easily exemplifies Foucault's assessments on these issues:

> the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate both us from the state and the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.[91]

Foucault continues,

> "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are by resisting the techniques of power that attach the individual subject to her or his own identity."[92]

Wilson and Foucault dare their audiences to reconceptualize performances of intersectional politics and the more traditional loci of power. Their texts suggest that rethinking these performances can assist in challenging racist and sexist ideologies. More precisely, new thinking and performances are required, so that one might divest from historical performances and problematic identifications previously inscribed on the African American female body, such as telling their own experiences that do not place them in a position of comparison to the mythic perfect white female.[93]

By refusing to be compared to white women, some African American women are able to (re)define and (re)emphasize the performances of identity, images and archetypes that reflect who they are and how they want to be seen. This is certainly the case in Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, where Jacobs' heroine Linda Brent suffers a fate similar to Frado's at the hands of her oppressor, Dr. Flint. Dr. Flint is furious because he has been unsuccessful in her attempts to exploit Brent sexually. Instead, Linda chooses to take Mr. Sands (a kindly white man) as a lover and becomes pregnant twice. When Dr. Flint learns that Linda has become pregnant for a second time, he becomes incensed and violent. Of the incident Jacobs writes:

> When Dr. Flint learned that I was again to be a mother, he was exasperated beyond measure. He rushed from the house, and returned with a pair of shears. I had a fine head of hair; and he often railed about my pride in arranging it nicely. He cut every hair close to my head, storming and swearing all the time. I replied to some of his abuse, and he struck me.[94]

There are several considerations in this passage. First, Linda reveals that her "fine" hair[95] was a sign of her pride. Linda's pride and attention to her hair reflects sensibilities from

her African ancestry and culture in that many Africans took great pride in grooming and styling their hair.[96] I contend that Linda's pride in her hair echoes Foucault's notion of care of self. Her attention to her hair, in an effort to presumably keep it healthy and attractive to her eye fosters the idea that she does so to please herself but also to rebel against Dr. Flint's anger over her attention to her self, body, and self-esteem.[97] Also, Linda's attention and pride in her hair also reflects Michel Foucault's principle of "aesthetics of existence":

> I am referring to what might be called "arts of existence." What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.[98]

Here Foucault highlights the potential for agency in our lives, and it is helpful in getting us to understand how Linda uses her hair to reconstruct an identity while still enslaved. In fact, it is important to consider that Linda's pride in her hair might have less to do with imitating whites as it does with her performance as a bricoleur. As enslaved Africans styled their hair, they merged their African past with both their present and the normative "white" standards of beauty. Such actions could be construed as a challenge to hegemony because they assist the enslaved in performing a new identity.[99]

The fact that Linda declares that she has a "fine" head of hair is also an example of how hair is a sign that, upon being read, can be utilized to help her to perform as a prideful woman who has some control over her body even while enslaved.[100] This transformation carries with it a sense of power in using her hair/body to create a place of agency for herself. In this sense, "fine" hair functions as a trope of resistance. That is to

say, by knowing that her hair is attractive, Linda reclaims her body even while she is legally enslaved, and the pleasure of feeling good about herself assists her in confronting and refusing her oppressor's attempts to sexually exploit her. Additionally, by loving her hair and ultimately herself, Linda is performing an aesthetic in the slave culture that her oppressor disliked.[101] She produces this aesthetic by daring to gaze at herself and reflecting that gaze back to her owners. Cultural critic bell hooks refers to this in Black Looks as "oppositional gazing," which means that there is power in looking or looking back.[102] Moreover, enslaved Africans looking at whites were thought to be imitating whites and subverting the power status quo. Looking and assessing value was reserved for whites, and certainly not African American women.[103] In this sense, when Linda dares to look at herself and sees herself not as her enslavers see her she is unsettling the slave culture. Linda is proud of her hair, which she thinks was beautiful. Here, hair functions as tropes for beauty, femininity, and seduction. Also, by looking and caring for her hair, she performs as a woman who is committed to changing her reality. The attention she gives to her hair and appearance helps her feel as if she is control over her body and not required to acquiesce to Dr. Flint's sexual demands. Such a performance is significant when one considers that during this historical period people of African heritage looking at a white person could have received severe punishment.[104] Linda's love for her hair and self demonstrates a performance of self-love and agency, which supports the notion that she is not a victim of a pathological white gaze.[105] The issue of Linda's agency is important because it demonstrates how she performs as an individual who is determined to have a role in the making of her representation. Thus, Linda refuses to embrace the identity that her owners have tried to inscribe on her body, and decides to take control of

her body (hair) by loving that which her owners despise.[106] Linda's agency is equivalent to power over the way she performs her identity.

The cutting of Linda's hair reveals Dr. Flint's agenda, which is to alter her appearance so that her sexual partner might become so repulsed by her masculine haircut that he would not to want maintain the sexual relationship. Yet, his intentions produce no such results as Linda continues her relationship with the father of her children. Dr. Flint believes that Linda uses her hair in her performance of seduction. However, Linda is not a seductress; she is a woman who wants to be liberated from slavery and who uses her hair and body as instruments in that endeavor.[107] Many other slave narratives also discuss sexual exploitation of the enslaved African woman[108] Hazel Carby discusses the dilemma this exploitation created for enslaved men and women alike:

> The victim appeared not just in her own right as a figure of oppression but was linked to a threat to, or denial of the manhood of the male slave. Black manhood, in other words, could not be achieved or maintained because of the inability of the slave to protect black women in the same manner that convention dictated the inviolability of the body of the white woman. The slave woman, as a victim, became the defined in terms of a physical exploitation resulting from the lack of the assets of white womanhood: no masculine protector or home and family, the locus of the flowering of white womanhood.[109]

As Linda resisted Dr. Flint's attempts at a sexual relationship, she accepted the advances of Mr. Sands. Of the latter, she writes:

> He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for a poor slave girl who trusted in him. Of course I saw wither all this was tending. I knew the impassible gulf between us; but to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except what which he gains by kindness and attachment.[110]

I argue that Linda uses her body and assets (her hair) to consciously[111] participate in a sexual relationship and, thereby, subverts the image of the sexually repressed or hypersexual African American woman.[112] Linda does not want to be seen as, or to perform as, a slave, and her pride, attention, and concern for her hair, body, and appearance allow her to begin to transform herself even while enslaved. The end result of both this transformation and Linda's act of taking a lover is that her partner might secure her freedom.[113] Linda is a woman committed to having autonomy over her body, even though as an enslaved woman her body is legally not her own. In this sense, Linda's identity is resituated through performance. Linda can perform an aspect of her identity via her hair and embrace the notion that she is an "object" of her own creating. Thus, this performance of agency in the end produces a new identity for Linda.

Performances of agency during slavery can also be seen as demonstrations of transverse tactics; i.e., the use of one's ability to manipulate controlled spaces. [114] Linda's transverse tactical performance allows her to deconstruct and problematize the image of what it means to a woman that is enslaved. Linda does not allow Dr. Flint to control her body completely; she manages to keep part of it for herself. Moreover, by attending to her body and her hair in particular, she is able to say through her performance that she is more than a slave. Linda's performance subverts Dr. Flint's domineering gaze, which is a liberating departure from the sexually exploitative history of the enslaved female and her master. Moreover, Brent's performance boldly says: I am a human being who has some control over my situation, environment, and body. Here again the enslaved female body (specifically hair) is a political site of struggle.

Another example of hair being used as a trope for race and gender may be found in the notice of flight which is circulated when she escapes.

> "$300 reward! Ran away from the subscriber, an intelligent, bright, mulatto girl, named Linda, 21 years of age. Five feet four inches high. Dark eyes, and Black hair inclined to curl; but it can be made straight. Has decayed spot on front tooth. She can read and write, and in all probability will try to get to the Free States. All persons are forbidden, under penalty of the law, to harbor or employ said slave. $150 will be given to whoever takes her in the state, and $300 if taken out of the state and delivered to me, or lodged in jail. [115]

This excerpt reveals the arbitrary and performative aspect of racial identities.[116] More specifically, while on the run Linda has to use her light skin and comparatively straight hair to perform as a white woman; this dissimulative performance illustrates the reiterating of white female normative behavior. Judith Butler uses performativity to capture the provisional and political nature of "gender trouble," of identity formation. Butler contends that performativity is the power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration. This means that identity, for example, comes into being through reiteration.[117] Conversely, race in Linda's case is performative, she cites what she has seen repeatedly as the way 'white women' behave and repeats what she has seen. Linda's hair also illustrates how race is a relational, non-essential characteristic. That is to say, if Linda, an enslaved African, can perform as a white woman and escape slavery without dramatically altering her appearance, then racial categories are fluid. Linda's escape from enslavement to North and her performance as a white woman are strategies of resistance against returning to the slavery culture.

The hair tropes explored in both Our Nig and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl illustrate that the physical body can be an instrument in the struggle for power.[118] Foucault contemplates the struggle for power when he writes:

> The main objective in these struggles is to attack not so much "such or such: an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power. The form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categories the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control or dependence, and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. [119]

Foucault's notion of power makes exploring domination difficult, because women participate in their own subjugation through the practice and deportment of feminine concerns with fashion, dieting exercise, and beauty techniques.[120] Foucault's notion is useful because it illustrates the need for some African American women to (re)examine how power functions in their daily lives and to (re)formulate new definitions of power. This new understanding of power is reflected in the way in which Frado and Linda's haircuts allow them to perform identities beyond servitude. The haircuts in these narratives demonstrate how some slave-owners tried to impose identities onto both Frado and Linda. However, these women recall these stories about their lives and bodies as sites of narration for those who have been historically silenced. The imposed performances of identity via their haircuts and the telling of their life histories permit Frado and Linda to negotiate those performances by writing about them which highlights, for example, Foucault's principle of "self care." Foucault's principle establishes the understanding that even though history is inscribed on the body, their development must continue regardless of history.[121]Wilson and Jacobs use their bodies, hair, of course, and the telling of their lived experiences in bondage and servitude as a means of demonstrating Foucault's "care of self." For instance, in Wilson's Our Nig, Frado, who is passive for most of the years

she is in the Bellmont's employ, finally, rebels. This rebellion occurs when Mrs. Bellmont attempts to punish Frado yet again for a minor infraction:

> She was sent for wood, and not returning as soon as Mrs. B. calculated, she followed her, and snatching from the pile a stick, raised it over her. "Stop!"shouted Frado, "strike me, and I'll never work a mite more for you;" and throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels the stirring of free and independent thoughts.[122]

This is another instance[123] where "self care" principles drive Frado to act out her insistence that she be treated as a good and valuable human being. She can no longer endure any of Mrs. Bellont's physical abuse if she wants to keep her body healthy. Thus, Frado ultimately rebels against Mrs. Bellmont and begins to nurture herself, establishing an appreciation for herself as a work of art, that is to say that Frado begins to understand that she has value and is precious as a human being.[124] She wants to establish a nonviolent relationship between herself and Mrs. Bellmont and ultimately (re)construct via "self care" herself as not subhuman (as Mrs. Bellmont had tried to construct her), but as a human being.[125]

Foucault's principle of self care is also demonstrated by Jacob's alter ego Linda Brent.[126] While Linda wants to tell her story and be truthful, she uses the pseudonym because she fears that others will treat her with scorn if her true identity is known.[127] Linda's telling of her story becomes an act of calling individuals to rise up and fight to abolish the enslavement of Africans. In this sense, Brent's "self care" illustrates her wish that her audience will act in a moral way. Certainly her writing about her time in slavery demonstrates her attempt to live a moral life that is rooted in the abolition of slavery.

"Self care" is also revealed in Linda's concern keeping her body healthy. Here the point goes beyond Foucault's premise that the body must be kept healthy, but that the

health concern pertains to having a healthy outlook in one's mind about one's body, represented in this case, by Linda's pride in and care for her hair. Indeed, the self care that Frado and Linda have for their hair is another means of thinking about caring for the self as a strategy against servitude. So, Linda's pride in her hair is an example of "self care" that functions as an instance of rebellion against as system that marked enslaved African women solely by their reproduction and labor abilities. Thus, Linda's sense of self-worth and efforts to try an perform an African American identity[128] that loves the way she looks echoes Foucault's discussion about keeping one's body healthy.

I argue that "self care" can be used to mean care of the ego—the sense of worthiness—that they body (hair included) is worthy of care. Thus, caring for one's hair becomes an expressing of nurturing the self and ego. Finally, applying Foucault's self care in considering how Frado and Linda perform aspects of their identities assists in accomplishing the important agenda of (re)constructing their identity while enslaved or as an indentured servant. Frado and Linda's care for their hair is an example of seeing beauty even as necessary to liberate themselves from the ideas and expected performances of others, leading to what Foucault would assert:

> The name of the ethical principle that leads people to cultivate themselves, that is to work to improve themselves. "This 'cultivation of the self' can be briefly characterized by the fact that one must 'take care of oneself.' It is this principle of the care of the self that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice.[129]

Linda's life writing illustrates that while she was not completely autonomous, principles of self care allowed her to circumvent the legal restrictions that limited her body, space, and identity performances. The same may be said of Frado. Moreover, I contend that their stories are typically linked in the collective experience of African Americans and

reflect their attitudes and understanding of their hair as signifier of their politicized bodies and lives.

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to explain how Harriet Wilson's Our Nig and Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl hair presents those writers use of hair as signifiers for race, class, gender, and sexuality; how hair in these fictional and non-fictional texts illuminates its use by some African American women as tools in identity performance.

NOTES

[43] Mary Helen Washington, ed., Black Eyed Susan Midnight Birds: Stories by and about Black Women. (New York: Anchor, 1975) xv.

[44] Frances Smith Foster, "Neither Auction Block nor Pedestal: The Life and Religious Experiences of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady," New York Literary Forum 12-13(1984):143-69.

[45]Here I borrow from Judith Butler's idea that gender is performed and is not wedded to material bodily facts. Instead, gender is exclusively a social construction, a fiction, one that, therefore, is open to change and contestation. While I employ Butler's theory I do so with the understanding, for example, that race is a social construct that does have real world consequences. This study is concerned with the artificial, conventional, and historical nature of race, gender, and sexuality as social constructs. See Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

[46] Harriet Wilson, Our Nig: Or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

[47]Harriet Jacobs, [Linda Brent] Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Boston: by the author, 1861).

[48] While I am aware of the importance and interconnectedness of history and literature, it is my hope to produce a study that is careful not to marginalize these African American women's writings by not focusing on the literary significance of their work.

[49] Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America (New York: Broadway Books, 1998) 29.

[50] I am fully aware of the rich oral tradition that also allowed some enslaved and formerly enslaved / indentured servants to tell their stories.

[51] Johnnie M. Stover, Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Women's Autobiography (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003) 21.

[52] Hine and Thompson 27.

[53] Suzette A. Henke, Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

[54] Daniel Taylor, The Healing Power of Stories: Creating Yourself Through the Stories of Your Life (New York: Doubleday, 1996) 56.

[55] Again, I am conscious of the fact that many life stories were passed orally between generations. However, my focus here is on the written and published texts of some oppressed African American women.

[56] Stover 201.

[57] Robyn Wiegman, American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 21-42.

[58] The inclusion of "Sketches" in the title of Wilson's narrative indicates that this is a brief account of a fragmented life history of a fragmented individual, as she herself points out in the introduction of the text. Frado's agency is evident years later when she is free to write her story. Wilson xxiii.

[59] While it is important not to overemphasize slave agency or an autonomous slave culture, it is also significant to consider that there is much that is written about that refutes the notion of slave infantilization. For additional examples, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., Women, Autobriography, and Theory: A Reader (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Eugene D. Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Saidiya Vhartman, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); William J. Cooper Jr., Michael F. Holt, and John McCardell, eds., A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[60] Wilson 16-17.

[61] Wilson 15.

[62] Wilson 39.

[63] Lois Leveen, "Dwelling in the House of Oppression: The Spatial, Racial, and Textual Dynamics of Harriet Wilson's Our Nig - Critical Essay," African American Review 53.4 (2001):561-580.

[64] Jack Bellmont is extremely conscious of Frado's overall appearance and sexuality according to Julia Stern. See Julia Stern, "Excavating Our Nig," American Literature 67.3 (1995): 439-66.

[65] For additional discussions about how the African American woman has been defined and controlled via her body see, for example, Hazel Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Cynthia J. Davis, "Speaking the Body's Pain: Harriet Wilson's Our Nig," African American Review 27.3 (1993):391-404; Gerda Lerner, ed. Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, (New York: Vintage Books, 1972); Sander L. Gilman, Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 83; Franz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks (San Antonio: Grove Press, 1991).

[66]Wilson 70.

[67]We come to know ourselves through reflection, not introspection contends Michel Foucault. See, Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences (New York: Vintage, 1994) 363. Similarly, Lacan argues that identity or subjectivity is formulated in the gaze. See Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., and trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978).

[68] Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in the U.S. Women's History eds. Vicki L Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 1994) 342-347.

[69] Shane White and Graham White, Stylin': African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 40.

[70] George P.Rawick, The American Slave: Supplemental Series 2, Volume II (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977) 2531.

[71] Michael Hatt, "Race, Ritual, and Responsibility: Performativity and the Southern Lynching," Performing the Body Performing the Text, eds. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (New York: Routledge, 1990) 77.

[72] Hatt 77.

[73] Carby 121-159.

[74] When gender and racial differences meet in the bodies of Black women, the result is the invention of an "other" argues Ann duCille. See, Ann duCille, Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 22.

[75] Eleanor Mason, "Hot Irons and Black Nationalism," Liberator (1963):12-15.

[76] Wilson 51.

[77]Mason 14.

[78]Lerner 163-164.

[79] Wilson 8. Also, by speaking about Frado's mother's sexuality and not her own, she presents the view that African American women are more than sexualized individuals.

[80] Davis suggests that the subtext of Frado's pain and shame is being raped by one (or all) of the Bellmont men. Cynthia J.Davis, "Speaking the Body's Pain: Harriet Wilson's Our Nig," African American Review 27 (1993): 391-404.

[81] Wilson xxxv.

[82] See for example, Dorothy Sterling, ed., We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984) 353-354.

[83] Henry Louis Gates, The Signifying Monkey: Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 131.

[84] Norman Fairclough, Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research (London: Routledge, 2003) 159.

[85] According to Judith Butler, identity is "performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express." See Judith Butler, Imitation and Gender Insubordination, Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991) 13-31.

[86] Here, I use the term trangressive to refer to behavior that allows individuals to move outside the racial and gendered confined established by society. My understanding of the "transgressive" is influenced by Michel Foucault's notion of transgression. See, Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Work of Foucault, 1954-1984, eds., Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994) 442-457.

[87] Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity,"Afterimage 20.1(1992): 14-20.

[88] Throughout Our Nig Frado takes Mrs. Bellmont's verbal and physical abuse. However, before leaving Mrs. Bellmont's employ and performing her new identity as liberated woman, Nig does present a notable moment of resistance when Mrs. Bellmont sent her to gather some wood. When the task took longer than expected, Mrs. Bellmont tried to beat Frado upon her return. Frado resists defiantly:

> "Stop!" shouted Frado, "strike me, and I'll never work a mite more for you;" and throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels stirring of free and independent thoughts." Wilson 105.

[89] It is important to note that while Wilson writes of he lived experiences, she also functions as a symbol of others who were oppressed.

[90] Warwick Wadlington, Reading Faulknerian Tragedy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987)31-32.

[91] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 134.

[92] Foucault (1990) 216.

[93] Carby 20-39.

[94] Jacobs 77.

[95] Linda is a mulatto and her "fine" hair likely resembled that of her white planter father. However, I contend that her pride in her hair was like that of some other enslaved Africans with more coarsely textured hair who took great pride in grooming their hair. See White and White (1995) 45.

[96] In some travel diaries like Dutch explorer Pieter de Marees,' the narratives included descriptions of Africans' diverse hairstyles. See John Thorton and Michael Adas, eds., Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 230. Also, in runaway slave notices, slave owners included observations about the escaped slaves' pride in their hair. See, for example, Baltimore Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser, July 30, 1782 (Windley, com., Runaway Slave Advertisements, III, 352).

[97] On the other hand, Jacobs could like her hair because of the "whiteness" of the texture and she might have styled her hair to resemble the white women she encountered

[98] Foucault (1990) 10-11.

[99] Shane White, Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995)199.

[100] I appreciate Professor James Smethurst's interpretation of Linda's loss of hair as signifying the opposition as a sort of appeal to white female readers that might be akin to her other manipulations of the conventions of femininity.

[101] Jacobs 77.

[102] bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Cambridge: South End Press, 1992)115.

[103] For a discussion "looking" and "imitating" whites and how some enslaved Africans were punished for such offensives, see for example, Lawrence Levine, Black Culture Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 139.

[104] Leon F. Litwack, Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) 268.

[105] Some enslaved Africans produced "necessary space" to perform their identity and life as not entirely produced in relation to slavery argues Lawrence Levine. Levine 80.

[106] Jacobs 77.

[107] Jacobs 55.

[108] Johnnie M. Stover, Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Women's Autobiography (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

[109] Carby 35.

[110] Jacobs 56.

[111] Jacobs admits that while she "did wrong" by having a sexual relationship with Mr. Sands, slavery causes individuals to behave in ways that do not reflect good morals. (55) But as Carby points out, Jacobs trades her virtue to survive enslavement. Carby 59.

[112] Carby 26-27.

[113] Carby 56.

[114] Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[115] Jacobs 97.

[116] Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: The Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993)187.

[117] Butler 187.

[118] Alison M. Jaggar and Susan Bordo, eds. Gender, Body, Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989) 19.

[119] Michel Foucault, The Essential Foucault: Selections From Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, eds., Paul Rainbow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994) 130.

[120] See the following: H. F Haber, "Foucault Pumped: Body Politics and the Muscled Woman," Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault, ed. S. J. Hekman (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1996) 147; Michel Foucault, The Essential Foucault: Selections From Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, eds. Paul Rainbow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994) 356. Nancy Hartsock finds Foucault's theories limiting because, she contends, he discounts "large scale social structures" and that there is little room for agency/resistance. See Nancy Hartsock,

"Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" ed. Linda J. Nicholson, Feminism and Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 1990) 157-172. However, Foucault is not merely concerned with how individuals participate in their own oppression, but also how power structures such as prisons, labor to discipline and oppress individuals.

[121] Foucault (1990) 67.

[122] Wilson 105.

[123] I noted earlier an example of Frado slowly becoming aware of her value as she is referred to less as Nig and more as Frado.

[124] Foucault (1990) 39.

[125] Wilson 88.

[126] Linda Brent is the pseudonym for the real woman Harriet A. Jacobs on whose life Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is based. Also, Frado is a pseudonym that Harriet Wilson uses to retell part of her life story in Our Nig, as Henry Louis Gates asserts in his introduction to Wilson's text.

[127] Carby 50.

[128] Richard Allen, The Concept of Self: A Study of Black Identity (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

[129] Michel Foucault, Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1986) 43.

CHAPTER II

(RE) READING AFRICAN AMERICAN HAIR POLITICS AND IDENTITY PERFORMANCES FROM THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE TO THE 1960S

"...wondering for the hundredth time just what form of vanity it was that had induced an intelligent girl like Margaret Creighton to turn what was probably nice live crinkly hair, perfectly suited to her smooth dark skin and agreeable round features, into a dead straight, greasy, ugly mess:"

The Harlem Renaissance (circa 1917-1928)[130] reflected a widespread rebirth of interest in and creative expression of African-American culture. Philosopher Alain Locke,[131] an influential Harlem Renaissance figure, celebrated the "New Negro,"[132] an individual committed to "absolute and unequivocal equality" for African Americans.[133] Many African American artists in this era began to look to Africa as the ancestral and artistic muse for their creative cultural productions, writing both of African sensibilities and of the oppression of their people.[134] Although the spirit of the New Negro lingered during the Urban Realism movement[135] (1940-1960, also known as the Richard "Wright School") of African American literature, writers in this genre, however, were more critical of the lived experiences of African Americans. Their literature focused on the frustration of some African Americans with the filth, corruption, identity politics, self loathing, internalized gendered racism, and anger generated by their long legacy of historical oppression. [136] Robert Bone describes their style of writing as follows:

> For the Wright School, literature is an emotional catharsis----a means of dispelling the inner tensions of race. Their novels often amount to a prolonged cry of anguish and despair...With rare exceptions, their style consists of a brutal realism...Their principle theme, reminiscent of Sherwood Anderson, is how the American caste system breeds "grotesques." [137]

Wright School literature dealt with the harshness and realties of African American life, with the purpose of illuminating for all (particularly white Americans) the effects of racism, sexism, and classism. Some writers in this genre also used their literature to protest the demeaning and stereotypical images perpetrated by supercilious white authors.[138]

As in previous eras, some African American female writers of the Harlem Renaissance and urban realism eras used their writing to interrogate the politicization of some African American women's bodies and identities vis a vis their hair. This chapter focuses on their use of hair as a means to (re)construct the identity polities and performance of some African American women. I argue that female artists such as Nella Larsen, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Zora Neale Hurston (among others) offer presentations of some African American women that use hair to disrupt both stereotypical notions of women's identity and a hegemonic world view of African American women's identities. I suggest that in these novels hair has been influential in (re)shaping how some African American women want to be seen and known. In these works, hair also acts in opposition to racist and sexist (re)presentations that suffuse in hegemonic discourse. Furthermore, it is my contention that hair in the work of Larsen, Fauset, and Hurston (among others) allows us to (re)consider the role that intersectional politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality plays in the realm of identity politics. Additionally, I propose that hair, in selected novels, functions as a signifier for (but not limited to) race, identity, race, femininity, and the transgressive.

Nella Larsen's two seminal novels Quicksand and Passing include hair as a signifier in her heroines' lived experiences. Larsen's heroine in Quicksand is Helga

Crane, a mixed race woman (i.e., with white mother and Black father) who is on a journey in search of identity and ever-elusive happiness in life. Larsen uses Helga to illuminate the concerns many African Americans have with their bodies (hair), class, community, employment, family, gender, race, sexuality, and subjectivity as they search for happiness. Her concerns about identity performance are foreshadowed by Larsen's use of the last four lines of Langston Hughes's poem "Cross" as an epigraph:

> My old man died in a big fine house,
> My ma died in a shack.
> I wonder where I'm gonna die,
> Being neither white nor black?[139]

Larsen introduces the trope of hair through Helga as she speaks to her colleague Margaret Creighton:

> "Heaven forbid," answered Helga fervently, "that I should ever again want work anywhere in the South! I hate it." And fell silent, wondering for the hundredth time just what form of vanity it was that had induced an intelligent girl like Margaret Creighton to turn what was probably nice live crinkly hair, perfectly suited to her smooth dark skin and agreeable round features, into a dead straight, greasy, ugly mess.[140]

I contend that Larsen's description of Margaret Creighton underscores the tensions between performances of self-care and self-loathing. Indeed, some African American females of the time did endeavor to perform a white female aesthetic. Kathy Russell, *et al.* suggest that such desires are understandable "in a society whose ideal beauty---blond, pale skinned, with blue eyes---embodies everything the average Black female lacks."[141] This sentiment resembles those expressed by some advocates of assimilation (e.g., Booker T. Washington[142] during the early part of the twentieth century. One way for women of the time to assimilate was to alter their hair to mirror whites.[143] Indeed, this type of mirroring, argues Noliwe Rooks, could be expected of some women, since "white

standards and imagery were so pervasive that they could not help but affect the majority of African Americans who came into contact with them."[144] However, as insidious as some instances of "white standards and imagery" were, they did not necessarily demonstrate examples of self loathing. They might instead have been, as Margaret Creighton states to Helga, attempts to have a "few decorations to brighten our sad lives."[145] Thus, the process of some African American women straightening their hair was not necessarily an attempt to adopt a white female normative beauty standard as part of their identity performances. Rather, in some instances, they show a desire for access to privilege and power---power to escape the limitations that accompanied African American female bodies.[146] The rhetoric of assimilation and the invasive images of whites as the normative standard might have influenced the changes in some African American women's hair. But, these changes could have also been a strategy employed by some African Americans to gain access to potentially greater economic opportunities and advancement.[147] I argue that, through this prism, we can use Margaret Creighton to illuminate the complexities and contradictions of straightened hair politics and performances.

Larsen also uses the character of Mrs. Hayes-Rore, a traveling lecturer and race woman, to show the tension of hair and identity politics among race men and women[148] of the 1920s. After leaving Naxos, Helga is hired as the assistant to Mrs. Hayes-Rore. Helga judges Mrs. Hayes-Rore critically, linking her recycled political speeches and ill fitting, fashion-backward clothing with her "badly straightened hair."[149] Her observations mark straightened hair as a trope for both antiquated race / identity politics and for conformity to whiteness as an aesthetic standard.[150] Larsen believes that Mrs.

Hayes-Rore's hair should match her politics of uplifting the race and should encourage her audience to love every aspect of themselves. To this end, Larsen wants African American hair in its natural state to function as "cultural armor."[151] Helga's negative references to Mrs. Hayes-Rore's appearance and speeches may reflect Larsen's belief that a race woman should present a positive image that includes (among other things) offering new concepts to help advance the race, purchasing contemporary clothing, and embracing the natural kink in her hair. Such a new performance might be welcomed by her ever-changing audience and times. Indeed, Larsen's critique of the old female race guard by way of their hairstyle politics illustrates the complexities of racial uplift. That is to say, it is contradictory to lecture about uplifting the race when the body reflects aspects of self-loathing and conformity to racist aesthetic sensibilities. Clearly, Larsen is saying that such hair, race, and gendered politics can not help advance the race.

Helga's observations on hair and identity politics underscore the nature of African American women's attempts to alter their hair texture because it seems a devaluation of their appearance and womanhood. They also show what filmmaker Lydia Douglas asserts is the pressure the dominant culture places on African Americans (via popular culture) to adhere to white standards of beauty. Douglas contends that altering the texture of African American women's hair is a way to conform to white racism.[152] Larsen's praise of African American women's natural hair reflects the spirit of the New Negro[153] in demonstrating the importance of throwing off slavery's aesthetic sensibilities and producing aesthetics that celebrate the "natural" characteristics/features of African American women.

The importance of beauty is also reflected in Helga's life at Naxos, an African American college. Helga's attention to her hair, body, and space speak to the beauty she is concerned with:

> Most of her earning had gone into clothes, into books, into the furnishings of the room which held her. All her life Helga Crane had loved and longed for nice things. Indeed, it was this craving, this urge for beauty which had helped bring her into disfavor in Naxos---"pride" and "vanity" her detractors called it.[154]

The importance of beauty is also evident when Mrs. Hayes-Rore (Helga's mentor) introduces Helga to her niece by marriage, Anne Grey:

> Anne Grey herself was, as Helga expressed it, "almost too good to be true." Thirty, maybe, brownly beautiful, she had the face of a golden Madonna, grave calm and sweet, with shining black hair and eyes. She carried herself as queens are reputed to bear themselves, and probably do not. Her manners were agreeably gentle as her own soft name. She possessed an impeccably fastidious taste in clothes, knowing what suited her and wearing it with an air of unconscious assurance. The unusual thing, a native New Yorker, she was also a person of distinction, financially independent, well connected and much sought after. And she was interesting, an odd confusion of wit and intense earnestness; a vivid and remarkable person. Yes, undoubtedly, Anne was almost too good to be true. She was almost perfect.[155]

These examples illustrate the importance Helga places on beauty. The use of hair as a sign for beauty illustrates their grounding in repression. The hair that Margaret Creighton alters is a physical manifestation of her African heritage, perfectly suited for her, and should not be devalued through the process of straightening. Creighton's "dead straight, greasy, and ugly mess" hair shows how this repression prevents her authentic self from being performed. Instead, she has committed to performing an aesthetic that is associated with images of white women. That this repression speaks to Helga and some other African American women (Margaret Creighton, Mrs. Hayes-Rore, and Anne Grey) she encounters illuminates the loss of self.

Psychoanalytic theories have become widely used in the analysis of literature, with particular interest in applying theories of identity and subject formation to the life writings of women. Some insight into the repression of natural identity performances and losses of selves in Quicksand can be gained through use of Lacan's theory of subjectivity. Lacan postulated that one's subjective identity would be formed in three stages (or, "registers") of development: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. The real stage (experienced before 6 months of age) comprises a primitive stage where the child's perceptions are filtered only through his / her senses without any censoring. Lacan's imaginary stage (6-18 months) comprises the stage where a child develops and uses images to form the ego. This stage includes the "mirror stage," where the child is first able to identify her / his reflection as an objective representation of herself / himself that is separate from both her / his actual person and her / his mother.[156] This (mis)recognition of self and subject / object dichotomy creates a gap or sense of lack, a fragmented self referred to by Lacan as an "hommelette."[157] It is in this stage that Helga first differentiates herself from her white mother, while likely seeing herself as still like her mother. At this time, Helga is still unaware of the racial gap between her and her mother.

Lacan's symbolic stage comprises the stage where the child learns to use language and becomes socialized. Here, the child's subconscious begins to develop, structured by the use of language such that the child's use of language becomes a reflection of their subconscious mind and desires. The imposition of "symbolic (social) order" is a phallocentric action, symbolically referred to as the "Law of the Father." For most girls, the symbolic stage is a time at which they confirm they are the same as their mothers.

For Helga, however, society's "one-drop" rule prevents her from ever reflecting her mother's mirror image[158] and insures that she will have a difficult time performing the identity of a white woman properly in the eyes of white society. Also, with her father being absent, Helga is unable to directly learn the ethos of African American performance from her father, and is forced to learn the "Law of the Father" from her white uncle.

Helga's physical appearance (light skin and long curly hair) further problematizes her performance as an African American woman, which in turn makes some African Americans' reading of her as dubious. For example, when Helga worries that her performance as an African American woman has not been read correctly at a party in Harlem, she reminds her former fiancé James Vayle in a conversation about living in America or in Europe as he gives her a lecture as to how African Americans always return home from abroad:

> "I'm afraid it's hard to explain. But I suppose it's just that we like to be together. I simply can't imagine living forever away from colored people."

To which Helga dourly replies:

> "I'm a Negro too, you know."

Vayle continues:

> "Well, Helga, you were always a little different, a little dissatisfied, though I don't pretend to understand you at all. I never did." [159]

The exchange between Helga and Vayle shows that Helga's performance as an African American is defined by what others observe as her "gap."[160]" As such Helga's identity performance is interpreted as out of place by others she encounters. The gap in Helga's performance does not improve when she visits white relatives in Copenhagen who want

her to perform her African ancestry in a more amplified manner. In the end, Helga feels that she has given another marginal performance as an African American. Helga sums up some white's perceived view of her identity: "she was attractive, unusual, in an exotic, almost savage way, but she wasn't one of them. She didn't at all count."[161] Helga's chances to try to recover her feminine imaginary ego and perform convincingly as a African American woman in resistance to the white masculine symbolic ideal are doubtful without an African American mother or other female relatives to "mirror." In this way, Helga develops a delicate ego towards internalized racism at both the imaginary and symbolic stages, and her sense of lack is made worse. These factors contribute to Helga's having a self image that places her alone in a liminal space.

In considering Helga's case, the work of Luce Irigaray hints that the symbolic stage concept is flawed because the foundation encourages male ideology as producing meaning and language for women. Irigaray counters that another system is needed to assist women to be "speaking subjects" (i.e., individuals conforming to the "Law of the Father") making their own meaning outside Lacan's symbolic stage.[162] Therefore, if Helga was allowed to freely define and perform her identity her performances would work to contradict internalized gendered racism. Yet, in both Europe and America, Helga is not allowed to be a "speaking subject" and endures what James Davis argues is the fact that African Americans and biracial individuals may only construct an African American identity because society, in accordance with the one-drop rule, defines them as Black.[163] This is not to say that Helga wishes to perform her identity as a white woman; she does not, and aside from Mrs. Hayes-Rore, her racial identity, while perhaps contemplated by others, remains a secret. Rather, the conundrum of race does not permit

biracial individuals to recognize their mixed raced heritage and claim their identity instead of having someone else force a category on them.[164] However, this point ignores the fact that many African Americans, aware of their mixed race heritage, adopt an African American racial identity as a means of being liberated from strictures that oppressed them.[165]

In the cases of the other women in Quicksand, Lacan's symbolic stage also highlights how some African American women feel forced to repress the imaginary self when they have to meet the challenges of racism and sexism in a white patriarchal society and develop (in the meaning of DuBois) a double consciousness. I contend that Creighton's and Hayes-Rore's hair highlight the effects that the ubiquitous "Law of the Father" had on their consciousnesses. As "speaking subjects," Creighton and Hayes-Rore are subjected to, bound to, and grounded in the representations and regulations of sexism and racism in society, specifically in terms of how they replicate the symbolic order (white) through their hair as part of the way they (re)construct their identity performance,[166] with the hope of gaining access to resources such as education, employment and some means of authority. I argue that such hopes encourage Creighton and Hayes-Rore to straighten their hair.

Helga's desire to perform an African American female aesthetic leads her to praise what she thinks Creighton's natural hair must look like when it has not been straightened. The compliment can be interpreted as an attempt to help some African American women feel better about their natural hair texture. In this sense, while Larsen's work reflects a contradiction to the fashionable hairstyles of the time, it was in line with the most progressive racial rhetoric of her time.[167] For example, during the 1920s, Marcus Garvey

and other African American leaders encouraged members of their race to embrace their African heritage and celebrate their black skin and African features.[168] Straightened hair was interpreted by them as both an insatiable vanity and a rejection of one's African heritage that could not be afforded.[169] A strong incentive for African American women to adhere to a white female normative mode of vanity is the hope of attracting men who prefer that aesthetic.[170] Consider this extreme attitude as expressed by Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver in his autobiography Soul on Ice:

> "You may not believe this...when I off a nigger bitch, I close my eyes and concentrate real hard, and pretty soon I get to believing that I'm riding one of them bucking blondes. I tell you the truth, that's the only way that I can bust my nuts with a black bitch, to close my eyes and pretend that she is jezebel. If I looked down and see a black bitch underneath me or if my hand happened to feel her nappy hair, that would be the end, it would be all over. I might as well get on up and spilt because I wouldn't be able to get anything down, even if I piled her all night long".[171]

Cleaver's comments reveal extreme self loathing among some African Americans,[172] and also how pathological internalized racism and sexism contribute to the devaluing of African American women's hair, bodies, and sense of self.[173] Cleaver further suggests that some African American women's hair be seen as the antithesis of beauty. In this manner, his comments replicate the idea of beauty being a construct---and an indicator of hierarchies of beauty and femininity among women. When some African American men refuse to date or marry women whose hair texture is not straight or long, they become co-conspirators in subverting the positive African American hair aesthetic.[174] Thus, some African American women with chemically/mechanically straightened hair are performing a form of vanity which is not their own. These African American women are performing a mode of vanity that is typically seen in white women. Even as they attempt to perform a white female normative standard of beauty, the tasks seem immensely impossible

because of African American women's long history of negative images. Of this point cultural critic bell hooks states:

> the dearth of affirming images of black femaleness in art, magazines, movies, and television reflects not only the racist white world's way of seeing us, but the way we see ourselves. It is no mystery to most black women that we have internalized racist / sexist notions of beauty that leads many of us to think we are ugly.[175]

This excerpt highlights how some African American women could internalize whiteness as the aesthetic standard and believe that straightening their hair is an acceptable way to perform an aspect of their identity. hooks argues that such efforts will never succeed because African American women will never be able to perform an aesthetic that resembles that of white women.[176] Moreover, straightening is only a temporary solution that leaves a trace[177] of "crinkly" hair that will eventually "go back home."[178]

Larsen uses an international backdrop to show how some whites use hair to construct their views and mode of identifying African American women. When Helga returns to Copenhagen after an absence she encounters an older female native who gazes upon Helga and is perplexed by her inability to mark Helga racially. The woman demands to know Helga's race; Helga replies, "I am Negro."[179] The woman is outraged and thinks that Helga is trying to trick her: she believes she knows Negroes when she sees them because they are black and have wooly hair.[180] Helga's attempt to perform as an "authentic"[181] African American woman is undermined by her skin and hair.[182] Her features always cause others to misread her performance as an African American woman, even though she never deliberately tries to pass for white. Helga's white looking hair and skin contribute exclusively to the misreading of her performances, and as a result she becomes more self-conscious about her place in the world because she can do little or

nothing to alter how she appears. As a result, she feels disconnected from both her African American heritage and her white heritage and is trying to find a space to belong. As Larsen notes, Helga can neither conform nor be happy in her unconformity.[183] Here, I maintain that Helga's lifelong desire to conform and her unhappiness in her unconformity grows out of unhappiness at being unable to construct an identity where she can fit naturally and comfortably with either African Americans or whites. As a result, Helga is a woman of unresolved identity, and this unresolved identity causes her to be unhappy and feel as if she is alone in the world.[184] The sentiment of having "no home" is reflected in Langston Hughes poem "Cross" that opens the novel:

> My old man died in a big fine house,
> My ma died in a shack.
> I wonder where I'm gonna die,
> Being neither white nor black?[185]

Indeed, Helga's entire unhappy journey in Quicksand is underscored by the fact that she feels as though her mixed race heritage[186] denies her identity, a way to perform her identity, and people and place to call her own.

The issue of mixed race heritage is revisited in Larsen's second novel Passing, in which she also uses hair as a trope for race. Passing is the story of two women: Irene Redfield, a Black wife and mother who occasionally passes for white, and Clare Landry, a Black woman (a mulatto father and an African American mother) whose "ivory skin" and "pale gold hair"[187] allow her to live as a married white woman. Her blonde hair performs a type of idealized femininity[188] that "reiterates her alabaster whiteness"[189] and convinces her racist husband (John Bellew) that she is indeed white. Clare also decides to perform

the identity of a white woman after living with her two white aunts Grace and Edna, who raised her after her alcoholic father died. Her aunts cruelly forced her to do all the household chores, endure their racist insults, and wear tattered clothing.[190] Clare abandons her race to improve her financial situation and mentions her desire to he childhood friend Irene:

> For, of course, I was determined to get away, to be a person and not a charity or a problem, or even the daughter of Ham. Then, too, I wanted things. I knew I wasn't bad-looking and that I could 'pass.' You can't know, 'Rene, how when I used to go over to the south side, I used to almost hate all of you. You had all the things I wanted and never had had. It made me all the more determined to get them, and others. Do you, can you understand what I felt?[191]

Clare's life with her aunts during her symbolic stage taught her that she was not a welcomed member of the symbolic order. At the same time, Clare became skilled at passing for a white woman, as her white aunts did not want anyone in their neighborhood to know that she was a "Negro." Their edict of silence and visibly white skin had made Clare's ability to elude whites effortless. These experiences showed her how arbitrary racial categories were, and showed her that passing was a "frightfully easy thing to do. If one's the type, all that's needed is a little nerve."[192] Hence, Clare's performance as a white woman allowed her to get away from the racist insults of her aunts and to get 'things' in life she yearned to have, such as love and comfort.[193] Her lack of racial pride and material goods contribute to her decision to perform a white woman. Furthermore, argues Nell Sullivan, Clare had to abandon her race because her aunts' mistreatment and negative notions about her race was robbing her of her culture. Clare's abandonment self-sacrifice of her culture becomes necessary for her to perform white identity in the

symbolic order[194] Clare's subsequent performance of a white identity is an effort to regain her humanity.[195]

Though Clare did not truly wish to perform again as an African American, a reunion with Irene rekindles her desire is to be among her people. Clare visits Irene in Harlem and desires to attend a dance that Irene is helping to organize. When Irene refuses to invite her, Clare declares, "You don't know, you can't know realize how I want to see Negroes, to be with them again, to talk to them, to hear them laugh."[196] Indeed, Clare risks her performance as a white woman to be around her people. However, Clare's visits to Harlem are not what complicate her performance. In a crucial scene, Irene (who had previously met Bellew while passing) literally bumps into Bellew on the street while arm-in-arm with her friend Felise, a Black woman with "curly black Negro hair." Bellew guesses Irene's secret and suspects his own wife might also be a Black woman performing as a white woman. Irene guesses that it is Felise's hair that disrupts her performance as a white woman.[197] Bellew eventually accuses Clare of passing for white; with tragic results.

Clare's ability to use her blonde hair and fair skin to perform as a white woman also helps her cross boundaries of class. This is most evident when Clare accompanies Irene to a black society dance of the Negro Welfare League. Larsen paints a vivid image of Clare's ensemble:

> Clare, exquisite, golden, fragrant, flaunting, in a stately gown of shining taffeta, whose long, full skirt lay in graceful folds about her slim golden feet; her glistening hair drawn smoothly back into a small twist at the nape of her neck; her eyes sparking like dark jewels.[198]

From this description Clare's clothing, hair, and mannerisms assist in her performance as the wife of a wealthy white man. Irene takes in Clare's performance and "regretted that

she had not counselled (sic) Clare to wear something ordinary and inconspicuous."[199] Of course, Clare does not dare wear anything ordinary because it might cause others to read her performance as that of a fair-skinned African American. Clare knows that a stately gown denotes her class position and racial heritage of a white woman and would do nothing to contradict her planned performance.

Larsen's Quicksand and Passing echo the spirit of the New Negro[200] as she critiques and satirizes the rigid and pathological class and racial categories and mutual mimicry of both African Americans and white Americans. Larsen's criticisms of the value that societies place on race / class categories that can so easily be straddled or nullified through performance are mirrored in Jesse Fauset's novel Plum Bun (1929). Fauset sets out to critique how the dominant culture has forced racialized and gendered performances on society. In particular, Fauset shows how the racial power and customs experienced in her characters' daily lives dictate what constitutes a valid performance of white woman. Plum Bun offers new ways to interrogate African American women's performance of identities, with emphasis on hair politics.

Plum Bun is the story of Angela Murray, a young woman from a respectable working class family in Philadelphia who (like her mother before her) passes for white. Fauset writes of her developing color consciousness:

> Colour or rather the lack of it seemed to the child the one absolute prerequisite to the life of which she was always dreaming. One might break loose from a too hampering sense of duty; poverty could be overcome; physicians conquered weakness, but colour, the mere possession of a black or a white skin, that was clearly one of those fortuitous endowments of the gods. Gratitude was no strong ingredient in this girl's nature, yet very often early she began thanking Fate for the chance which in that household of four had bestowed on her the heritage of her mother's fair skin. She might have easily have been, like her father, black or have received the mélange which had resulted in Virginia's rosy

> bronzeness and her deeply waving black hair. But Angela had received not only her mother's creamy complexion and her soft cloudy, chestnut hair, but she had taken from Junius the aquiline nose, the gift of some remote Indian ancestor which gave to his face and his eldest daughter's that touch of chiseled immobility.[201]

Fauset continues,

> Angela's mother employed her colour very much as she practiced certain winning usages of smile and voice to obtain indulgences which meant much to her and which took nothing from anyone else. Then, too, she possessed of a keener sense of humor than her daughter; it amused her when by herself to take lunch at an exclusive restaurant whose patrons would have been panic-stricken if they had divined the presence of a "coloured" woman no matter how little her appearance differed from theirs.[202]

These passages (sarcasm aside) illustrate how Angela learns of the currency of whiteness from her mother's performances. The currency is only valid if the features of the performer match those of whom they are imitating. Indeed, without "fair skin" and "deeply waving black hair," Angela would be unable to make her performance believable and thus be unable to partake of some of the basic opportunities afforded whites.

Angela later moves toward embracing a racial performance situated in the world of African Americans. The catalyst for this shift is Angela's visit to Maude's hair salon in Harlem:

> There was a hairdresser's establishment on 136th Street where Virginia used to have her hair treated; where Sara Penton, whose locks were of the same variety as Matthews's used to repair to have their unruliness "pressed". Here on Saturdays Angela would accompany the girls and sit through the long process just to overhear the conversations, grave and gallant and gay, of these people whose blood she shared but whose disabilities by a lucky fluke she had been able to avoid. For, while she had been willing to re-enlist in the struggles of this life, she had never closed her eyes to its disadvantages; to its limitedness! [203]

The hair salon provides a space for Angela to learn how to perform African American female identity from other women and offers her a community to which she can be linked racially.[204]

Fauset used the hair salon as a storehouse of culture where some African Americans come to have their hair cared for, gather to exchange ideas, take refuge from racial discrimination, and engage in fellowship. Zora Neale Hurston uses front porches in a similar fashion in her novel Their Eyes Were Watching God. Hurston's troubled heroine Janie is on a journey of self determination and Hurston uses her hair as a trope for numerous things: youthfulness, independence, the phallic, submissiveness, whiteness, femininity, luck, and identity.

The first example of this trope occurs at the opening of the book where Janie is returning home from her adventures with her third husband Vergible Woods, nicknamed "Tea Cake." Watching Janie's movements from the porch they're sitting on, some local women discuss her appearance:

> "What she doin' coming back here in dem overhalls? Can't see find no dress to put on?--Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in? --Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her?--What dat ole forty year ole 'oman doin' wid her hair swingin down her back lak some young gal?--Where she left dat young lad of a boy she went off here wid?--Thought she was going to marry?--Where he left her?--What he done wid all her money?--Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain't even got no hairs--why she don't stay in her class ?"[205]

In this excerpt, the women see Janie's long and cascading hair as belonging to young women only.[206] They think a woman Janie's age should wear her hair pulled up, so as not to attract attention from men. (Indeed, Janie's long hair is viewed as sexy and desirable by the local men.[207] The women turn that notion on its head by signifying that Tea Cake

probably left Janie for a younger woman without hair, emphasizing that youth has more currency even the long luxurious hair Janie flaunts. However, I contend that Janie wears her hair down to show that she is alive and that her relationship with Tea Cake has opened her to love, lust and sex. Her hair performance says that she is not prepared to be tied down by archaic social customs; instead, she is an independent woman and says through her unpinned hair that she alone will decide how she will live her life. Janie is not concerned with what others think of the performance of her new identity.[208] Similarly, the women interpret Janie's overalls as part of her performance of youth and a defiance of social customs for older women. Yet, Janie wears the overalls because Tea Cake wore them and she likes them.[209]

As in the works of Larsen and Fauset, Janie's hair also serves as a trope of whiteness. Since Janie's mother was raped and impregnated by a white man, Janie has some white racial characteristics.[210] Having her father's hair makes Janie special within the Black community, and more desirable to Black men because it places her closer to the white woman who is held up as the standard of beauty. Similarly, her mulatto neighbor Mrs. Turner views her family's straight hair and white racial features (i.e., nose and lips) as indicators that they should be viewed by all as a special class of Blacks. In trying to interest Janie in her brother, Mrs. Turner links her brother's intellect and accomplishments to his white features:

> You oughta meet mah brother. He's real smart. Got dead straight hair. Dey made him uh delegate tuh de Sunday School Convention and he read uh paper on Booker T. Washington and tore him tuh pieces![211]

Ms. Turner implies that her brother's white looking appearance helped him obtain a voice of authority on matters concerning the race. In this instance his hair provides him with

cultural currency. Hair is also a signifier for establishing other individuals' racial identities. In one of the few moments where whites play a directly significant role, Tea Cake is pressed into service to clear the wreckage of the hurricane and help bury the dead. When he asks how he might separate the decomposing bodies by race, he is told to look at their hair.[212] Ironically, this process would insure that mulattoes like Janie and the Turners would end up being buried with whites.

Janie's looks inspires Black men to objectify her and transfer to her their desires for power over Whites. Janie's grandmother discusses this desire with Janie:

> Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule of the world so fur as Ah can see.[213]

The men in Janie's life express their conflicting desires for Janie's love and acquiescence through their focus on her hair. Janie's first husband is Logan Killicks, a man that she does not love. Initially, Logan offers her his devotion. As time passes, however, Logan becomes less expressive:

> Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her. He had ceased to wonder at her long black hair and finger it. Six months back he had told her,
>
> "If Ah kin haul de wood heah and chop it fuh yuh, look lak you oughta be able tuh tote it inside. Mah fust wife never bothered me 'bout choppin' no wood nohow. She'd grab dat ax and sling chips lak uh man. You done been spoilt rotten.[214]

Here, Logan's measure of interest in Janie is reflected in caressing her long hair, which acts a trope of femininity. One might read Janie's long hair here as a sign of white femininity, since a financially solvent white woman (who has long, straight hair) is

liberated from doing man's work. For Killicks, her hair has lost its mystery and importance. Moreover, now he expects her to labor just as hard as he does. The breaking point in their marriage comes shortly afterwards when Logan orders Janie to help him move a pile of manure.[215]

Janie's growing dissatisfaction with Logan leads her to leave him for Joe Starks (a.k.a. "Jody"), her second husband. Like Killicks, Jody endeavored to control Janie, and ultimately forced her to wear her long hair tied up so as not to attract attention from other men:

> This business of the head-rag irked her endlessly. But Jody was set on it. Her hair was NOT going to show in the store. It didn't seem sensible at all. That was because Joe never told Janie how jealous he was. He never told her how often he had seen the other men figuratively wallowing in it as she went about things in the store. And one night he had caught Walter standing behind Janie and brushing the back of his hand back and forth across the loose end of her braid ever so lightly so as to enjoy the feel without Janie knowing what he was doing. Joe was at the back of the store and Walter did not see him. He felt like rushing forth with the meat knife and chopping off the offending hand. That night he ordered Janie to tie up her hair around the store. that was all. She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others.[216]

Indeed, Jody wants to hide that part of Janie's beauty for his eyes only. Janie is his wife, and he refuses to allow anyone else to desire her—he wants to own her. He alone wants to touch and admire her hair. The significance of the act is not lost upon her neighbors:

> "Whut make her keep her head tied up lak some ole' oman round de store? nobody couldn't git me tuh tie no rag on mah head if Ah had hair lak dat."
> "Maybe he make her do it. Maybe he skeered some de rest of us mens might touch it round dat store. It sho is uh hidden mystery tuh me."[217]

Upon Jody's death from kidney failure, Janie's first act is to loosen her hair. Her hair ultimately becomes a signifier of her freedom:

> Before she slept that night she burnt up every one of her head rags and went about the house next morning with her hair in one thick braid

> swinging well below her waist. That was the only change people saw in her. She kept the store in the same way except of evenings she sat on the porch and listened and sent Hezakiah in to wait on late customers. She saw no reason to rush at changing things around. She would have the rest of her life to do as she pleased.[218]

The death of Jody affords Janie the same level of autonomy as the African American men in the community. Her removal of the hair rag demonstrates a performance that moves her from her passive role as a woman to a more aggressive role in controlling her own body and life. In this sense, Janie's long braid functions a sign of male privilege and power; hanging down past her waist as a type of phallic symbol.

For Tea Cake, however, Janie's hair is clearly a marker of beauty and femininity. Although Tea Cake is drawn to all aspects of Janie, he especially loves her hair and wishes to fondle it as much as possible:

> Then Tea Cake went to the piano without so much as asking and began playing blues and singing, and throwing grins over his shoulder. The sounds lulled Janie to soft slumber and she woke up with Tea Cake combing her hair and scratching the dandruff from her scalp. It made her more comfortable and drowsy.
>
> "Tea Cake, where you git uh comb from tuh becombin' mah hair wid?"
>
> "Ah brought it wid me. Come prepared tuh lay mah hands on it tuhnight."
>
> "Why, Tea Cake? Whut good do combin' mah hair do you? It's mah comfortable, not yourn."
>
> "It's mine too. Ah ain't been sleepin' so good for more'n uh week cause Ah been wishin' so bad tuh git mah hands in yo' hair. It's so pretty. It feel jus' lak underneath uh dove's wing next to mah face."[219]

Tea Cake, unlike Killicks, takes pleasure in Janie's hair. This admiration produces a win-win situation. Tea Cake gets to run his fingers through his woman's hair, thus soothing her. In the end, they both get pleased. Also, unlike Joe, Tea Cake does not insist that Janie cover her hair; rather, he seems unfazed by other men's looking at her hair. In fact, Tea Cake thinks that other men's looking at her hair is merely appreciating her beauty.

Thus, their gazes do not threaten him. Finally, Tea Cake gives the impression that he is not as jealous as Joe, and tries to view Janie as somewhat of an equal partner in their relationship.

Tea Cake's tragic death provides Janie with freedom that allows her to begin performing new identities that contradict the ones her grandmother and husbands orchestrated for her to perform. As the novel ends, Hurston writes of Janie, "She closed in and sat down. Combing road-dust out of her hair."[220] One can read this line to suggest that the dust free hair represents Janie's new identity of a woman who is free to roam the world and do as she pleases.[221] As such, she would be moving outside society's notions of what is acceptable for women. She can travel alone and make her own rules along the way because she has carved out a new identity for herself. Janie is now a truly free woman.

Another novel using hair as a trope is Ann Petry's The Street, the complex tale of Lutie Johnson, an uneducated African American woman in 1946 who is estranged from her husband and tries to raise her son in an impoverished community. Petry's use of hair tropes in The Street is not lost on her publishers, obviously, and the different covers of the different editions of the novel reveal interesting changes, over time, in the various publishers' reading of the trope of Lutie's hair. The case of the first edition, (re)presents Lutie as a beautiful African American woman with long shiny hair---a hairstyle typical of many African American women of the 1940s. This picture suggests that Lutie Johnson is an African American woman of staunch, middle class, "proper standing" when the novel is reprinted during the 1960s the book cover shows Lutie with shorter hair and a clingy red dress, an image which conjures a hot, sexy image of Lutie that is significantly different from the image of the first edition. In fact, this cover erroneously suggests that

Lutie is a prostitute. Also, while the 1940s cover focuses only on Lutie, this 1960s cover has Lutie flanked by a man. This man could be one of two characters who try to exploit Lutie once she moves to the street: Jones, the superintendent, or Boots Smith, who attempts to rape her. Also joining Lutie on the cover is Mrs. Hedges, a madam who sits in the window watching and looking for people to exploit. Curiously, the publishers of this edition ignore Petry's description of Mrs. Hedges, who wore a bandana to hide the fact that she lost all of her hair in a fire. On the cover, Mrs. Hedges appears sans bandana with a head full of silvery hair. It's possible that the publishers wanted to depict Mrs. Hedges as a somewhat glamorous madam and felt that this representation of Mrs. Hedges was more believable. This change reinforces the theme of a woman without hair having little aesthetic value, power to influence, or to persuade others. A more accurate representation of Mrs. Hedges (with bandana) is shown in the 1980s cover. It is interesting to note that here, Mrs. Hedges is the only character shown on the cover, giving the impression that this woman with a bandanna is the main character of the book. After reading the back cover, one might even assume that her picture is actually a picture of Lutie.

The 1991 printing of The Street places Lutie and her son Bub (who appears for the first time) on the street. Here, Lutie is no longer showing a sexy side. Instead, she wears a suit that reflects the fact that she works in an office as a secretary, rather than as the prostitute suggested by the 1960s cover. Her hair similarly suggests a no-nonsense woman, rather than the sexy siren of the 1960s cover.

The colorful, provocative 1960s cover contrasts markedly with the cover for the 2000 edition. The latter is a black and white photograph showing only the legs of Lutie and

Bub. Lutie wears a sensible business skirt and high heel pumps that mark her as an office worker. Her legs are signifiers of beauty that substitute for her missing face and hair. Bub's clothing is old and worn in appearance, which seems appropriate since Lutie is a poor single working mother. Both her legs and son are signifiers of Lutie's sexuality. These signifiers mark Lutie (like so many other Black women) by her labor and reproduction.[222] The shift from hair to legs could be read as a more transparent attempt to (re)construct Lutie as a sexual object. While Lutie is still interpreted as a worker, the subtext raises questions about her line of work. Lutie is not a prostitute; however, these representations of Petry's novel might convey to some that she is. Such representations make it difficult for some audiences to embrace the idea that not all African American women are prostitutes.

Hair tropes also play a significant role in the text itself. In the beginning of the novel, Petry personifies the street and wind and they alter Lutie's body— specifically, her hair:

> The wind lifted Lutie Johnson's hair away from the back of her neck so that she felt suddenly naked and bald, for her hair had been resting softly and warmly against her skin.[223]

In this sense the Street and wind literally and figuratively alter the dynamics of the African American female body/hair.[224]

Mrs. Hedges, the lone survivor of an apartment fire, is left with a disfigured and bald headed. When her business partner Junto visits her in the hospital to comfort her, Mrs. Hedges complains "I ain't going to have any hair left." Junto suggests wearing a wig.[225] However, Mrs. Hedges, not being one to conform to white aesthetic standards, refuses to wear a wig. Junto persists:

> Apparently he still wasn't discouraged, because just the other night he came to see her he brought a wig with him. He tossed it in her lap. The

> hair was black, long, and silky. It was soft under her fingers, curling and clinging and attaching itself to her hands almost as though it were alive. It was the kind of hair that a man's hands would instinctively want to touch. She pushed it away violently, thinking how the hard, black flesh of her face, the forward thrust of her jaws, the scars on her neck, would look under that silken, curling hair.[226]

Mrs. Hedges knows that part of a woman's perceived value comes from her hair and fears that the lure of the soft, long hair of the wig would lead a man to discover her burned scalp.[227] Junto likes Mrs. Hedges, but she worries that his rejection of her might be too much for her to bear. By refusing the wig, she realizes that she will probably never again have the love or sexual attention of a man.[228] Her hairless head functions as a scar which allows her to perform as an indomitable, transgressive spirit, and she, in turn, is able to use her body as a site for self-evaluation and self-redefinition. [229] At the same time, Mrs. Hedges' desire to perform as a sexual being leads her to live vicariously through the women with luxurious hair that she exploits for her economic gain. This is evident in the way that Mrs. Hedges looks longing at the hair of Mary, Lutie, and other women who pass on the street. Petry describes the twitch in Mrs. Hedges' face as she thinks of how Lutie's hair makes her more desirable as a commodity for Junto.[230] Hair in this instance as a trope for sexual attractiveness and commodification helps provide meaning for the beauty of African American women's hair, albeit through exploitation.

Gwendolyn Brooks also uses hair as a trope of beauty in her 1953 debut novel Maud Martha. Maud is a dark brown woman who believes that her redeeming features were her long wavy hair and her ability to be nice.[231] Her feelings are rooted in her father's preference of her sister Helen, a lighter-skinned woman with short, limp hair. While her father, a man who loves order in all things, finds Maud's "untameable"[232] wavy hair valuable because it approximates a white aesthetic, he values the currency of

Helen's skin more. While Maud is a fictional character, I contend that value system with which Maud is familiar is hardly uncommon among many African Americans[233] The value of this aesthetic is exemplified by the attention of Paul Phillips, a potential suitor for Maud who thinks her long straight hair is "good" (i.e., like that of whites). Presumably, Paul desires to be with someone whose DNA will compliment his own and help produce offspring with features that have aesthetic currency within the African American community. As a result, his children would be viewed as beautiful in the African American world. Paul would be proud to have children that look white. This currency makes Maud (although dark) a possible mate for the light skinned Paul.[234]

Brooks takes the reader into the world of African American women, hair politics, and hair salons to provide a glimpse of the way some African American women (re)construct their identities. Maud visits Sonia Johnson's hair salon where Sonia straightens Maud's long hair to help it be read as a sign for attractiveness, desirability, and femininity. Maud testily thinks: "If she burns me today." The burn is no small matter. The pain Maude could endure, but the possible scar that might be left would mark for others that Maude's performance of attractiveness, desirability, and femininity via her hair is not natural and must be provided through the skills of a professional. This is not to say that Maude is trying to deceive Paul or others. She believes others see her as she sees herself: a dark-skinned African American woman with pronounced features.

> But I am certainly not what he would call pretty. Even with all this hair (which I have just assured him, in response to his question, is not "natural", is not good grade or anything like good grade) even with these nice ears, I am still, definitely, not what he can call pretty if he remains true to what his idea of pretty has always been. Pretty would be a little cream-colored thing with curly hair.[235]

In this passage, Maud, a fictional character, echoes what some African American women feel about their hair.[236] Interestingly, this issue continues to resonate within contemporary culture. The classifications of "good hair" and "bad hair" still concern many African American women's consciousnesses. In her ethnographic study Hair Matters, Ingrid Banks revisits the underlying tension of this issue in an interview with an African American woman (Raine) discussing the children's book Nappy Hair[237]:

> Because blacks are judged on their hair. I think basically the long, straight hair people are more favorable. The shorter, kinkier, nappier, [the] hair, the less favoritism is shown. I've lived that, coming through school as a young girl I was dark, but I had long hair. I was put with the little light [skin] long-haired kids. But the ones who had the short, measly, nappy hair, no matter what they looked like, they were always last, in the back.[238]

Here the young woman highlights negative beliefs about some African American's hair. This instance demonstrates how hair becomes a symbol of alienation and plays a role in establishing hierarchies among some African American women. The fictional Maud reflects a viewpoint (as Banks' work illustrates) that some women are (fairly or unfairly) judged by their hair. In Maud Martha, I argue, we have an example that illuminates how those who appear to fall short of these female signifiers are distinctly labeled "unfeminine" or "grotesque."[239] That novel reveals, for women in particular, the advantages of being fair-skinned were enormous. Lightness of complexion meant being invited to high-society teas and admittance to the white clubs uptown. Jervis Anderson, in This Was Harlem, notes that the successful and more socially inclined citizens of Harlem were,

> ... for the most part mulattos of light brown skin and have succeeded in absorbing all the social mannerisms of the white American middle class. Moreover, their class and race consciousness reflect their compelling and sometimes unconscious ambition is to be as near white as possible, and

> their greatest expenditure of energy is concentrated on eradicating any trait or characteristic known as Negroid.[240]

While with Paul, Maud's appearance further illuminates how light skin color and curly hair function as signifiers for desirability within some quarters of the African American community:

> They looked at her hair. They liked to see a dark colored girl with long, long hair. They were always slightly surprised, but agreeably so, when they did. They supposed it was the hair that had got her that yellowish, good-looking Negro man. [241]

Even with her long hair Maud believes that her performance as a desirable woman, according to the normative white female standard, is limited because she is African American, and limited even further because she is dark and her straight hair is not "natural" and falls short in performing this part of female identity. Certainly, Maud's long hair does not prevent her from being looked upon as a curiosity. When Maud and her husband attend a movie, the white counter girl stares at Maud and her long straight hair as if she were an oddity because she does not "look" like the African Americans the white girl is accustomed to seeing. In this sense, Brooks' text reveals the curiosity piqued by African American women whose hairstyles provide an unusual reflection that mimics (but does not closely approximate) the white female norm.

Brooks also uses hair as a trope for disorderliness/transgression in her descriptions of Maud's poor and struggling neighbor, a woman whose husband had abandoned her and their three children. A list of his many problems included his wife's conduct:

> ... the coming back at night, every night, to a billowy diaper world, a wife with wild hair, twin brats screaming, and writhing, and wetting their crib, and a third brat, leaping on, from and about chairs and table with repeated Hi-yo Silvers, and the sitting down to a meal never quite adequate, never

> quite—despite all your sacrifices ... It was altogether too much, so one night he had simply failed to come home.[242]

By implication, if this woman with "wild hair" were performing as a productive mother and wife, she would take the time to care for her hair, her small home would be neat, her children would behave, and with all of this her husband would surely have been happier. Her "wild hair" is subsequently a sign for a transgressive performance that resists the restrictive traditional roles for women. Clearly, in this sense, Brooks turns the performance of wife and mother on its head, thereby offering African American women a new identity through their hair. The value of such a performance in this semi-autobiographical novel is the disruption of static notions of traditional roles for African American women and foregrounds the dynamic and multiplicity of identity which allows for a production of new selves.

Overall, the action of straightening their hair functions as a means of producing representational borders and political ideology for some African American women committed to perpetuating a white normative female standard of beauty.[243] Despite straightening their hair, many of Brooks' characters are frustrated in their attempt to live up to the dominant culture's concept of attractiveness.

While Brooks' novel is forthright about the problems confronted by African American women trying to live up to the impossible task of performing a white beauty standard, it does not offer a definitive alternative. I think it is important to note that while Brooks does not present an alternative in Maud Martha, the subject of African American women's hair and identity politics was one she was concerned about. I argue that her concern is evident in her poem "Sisters" (interrogated in Chapter 6), which

serves as an homage to African American women who refuse to fall victim to externally defined standards of beauty and (alternatively) wear their hair "natural." A second alternative approach may be found in Helene Cixous' seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." Cixous suggests that women reject unrealistic images and transform themselves into images that they like and control.[244] Thus, African American women must stop participating in their own degradation. Maud Martha will always be troubled by being viewed as an oddity by others as long as she continues to embrace the negative notions of beauty. Yet, Maud comes into her own and becomes more confident after the birth of her daughter. Brooks's audience is left with the hope that Maud has become conscious of the value of her features and values the conjunction of gender and race in her construction and performance of identity.[245] Brooks conjoins race, gender and hair politics in the construction of African American female identity.

As America approached the 1960s, African American female writers continued to use hair as a trope of identity construction and performance. In her critically acclaimed play *A Raisin in the Sun*, playwright Lorraine Hansberry uses hair as a trope to explore assimilation and anti-assimilationist notions regarding African American women's hair. Hansberry's progressive young feminist heroine is pre-med student Beneatha, who is trying to perform an identity that presents her as an independent young woman. However, Beneatha acts as though there is something wrong with her body and (specifically) her hair. When she straightens her hair, her African suitor, Asagai, brings her a present from home that gives her a reason to return her hair to its original state:

> Beneatha: [Eagerly opening the package and drawing out some records and colorful robes of a Nigerian woman.] Oh, Asagai!...You got them for me!...How beautiful...and the records too! [She lifts out the robes and runs to the mirror with them and holds the drapery up in front of herself.]

Asagai: [Coming to her at the mirror.] I shall have to teach you how to drape it properly. [He flings the material about her for the moment and stands back to look at her] Ah-Oh-pay-gay-day, oh-ghab-mu-shay.[A Yoruba exclamation for admiration] You wear it well…very well…mutilated hair and all.
Beneatha: [Turning suddenly] My hair—what's wrong with my hair?
Asagai: [Shrugging] Were you born with it like that?
Beneatha: [Reaching up to touch it.] No…of course not. [She looks back to the mirror, disturbed]
Asagai: [Smiling] How then?
Beneatha: You know perfectly well how…crinkly as yours…that's how.
Asagai: And it is ugly that way?
Beneatha: [Quickly] Oh, no---not ugly…[More slowly, apologetically.] But it's so hard to manage when its, well—raw.
Asagai: and to accommodate that---you mutilate it every week?
Beneatha: It's not mutilation!
Asagai: [Laughing aloud at her seriousness.] Oh…please! I am only teasing you because you are so very serious about these things. [He stands back from her and folds his arms across his chest as be watches her pulling at her hair and frowning in the mirror.] Do you remember the first time you met me at school? … [He laughs.] You came up to me and you said---and I thought you were the most serious little thing I had ever seen—you said:[He imitates her.] "Mr. Asagai---I want very much to talk with you. About Africa. You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity! [He laughs.]
Beneatha: [Turning to him, not laughing.] Yes---[Her face is quizzical, profoundly disturbed.]
Asagai: [Still teasing and reaching out and taking her face in his hands and turning her profile to him.] Well…it is true that this is not so much a profile of a Hollywood queen as perhaps a queen of the Nile---[A mock dismissal of the importance of the question.] But what does it matter? Assimilationism is so popular in your country.
Beneatha: [Wheeling, passionately, sharply.] I am not an assimilationist![246]

Beneatha's understanding of her identity as an African American woman is based on an ideology of racism that has convinced Beneatha that her hair has to be "managed" when it is "raw." Like Maud Martha, Beneatha has misrecognized herself in the haze of racism, and as such performs as a young woman uncertain of who she is and her value as an individual. While Asagai is more agreeable than her previous suitor (the

assimilationist George Murchison), he is chauvinistic. His present of clothing and head scarf reinforces stereotypical gender roles by recalling a stereotypical male ethos of controlling and providing what a woman needs. For her part, Beneatha reinforces a stereotypical female ethos of needing to have things given and explained to her, particularly in her willingness to ask her (then) new acquaintance to tell her how to perform her identity.[247] Beneatha's behavior illustrates how some women are complicit in the oppression of their minds and bodies.

Hansberry's work suggests that African American women that straighten their hair are performing self-mutilation to fit into a world where they are not wanted. The acceptance of self-mutilation to hide one's own features for social acceptance is a virtual demonstration of what Michel Foucault has called a confinement (to be read here as containment) which reveals madness:

> Ultimately, confinement did seek to suppress madness, to eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find its place within it; the essence of confinement was not the exorcism of a danger. Confinement merely manifested what madness, in its essence, was: a manifestation of non-being; and by providing this manifestation, confinement thereby suppressed it, since it restored it to its truth as nothingness. [248]

Under the lens of Foucault, the racist ideology that has given Beneatha the impression that she must "contain" or "confine" her African hair represents a form of confinement of the mad. Beneatha comes to understand that the way to liberate herself from confinement is to learn how to perform a healthy aesthetic that allows her to embrace her hair in its "raw" form. As Beneatha models her new African clothing and headdress, declaring, "Enough of this assimilationist junk!" her madness[249] disappears. Her new identity performance celebrates her African heritage and shows her increasing awareness of its

importance. The audience becomes hopeful that she will be proficient in controlling her own identity construction. [250]

In the film version[251] of the play, Beneatha does not wear the head wrap Asagai gives her, and her hair remains chemically straightened. Perhaps this difference (the play premiered in 1959 and the film in 1961) has to do with concern over maintaining the film's mainstream appeal. Lisbeth Lipari suggests that executives at Columbia Pictures repeatedly excised "excessive race issue material" from Hansberry's screenplay in order to retain the sympathies of white viewers.[252] The head scarf aside, I contend that Beneatha has essentially thrown off the shackles of the white aesthetic without replacing them with the African man's mode of head wrap for her hair. Instead, she exercises her right to choose. She is performing as she sees fit, even if that new identity is not clearly defined.

A later work showing hair as a signifier for class, sexism, and sexual appeal is Alice Childress' 1969 play "Wine in the Wilderness." At the center of the story is Bill, an African American male artist who is producing three paintings to (re)present African American females. The first painting is of a young African American girl, which represents innocence. The second is of his "ideal woman," an African queen or "wine in the wilderness," and the third, which is not been painted, is of a common, vulgar woman. Bill is searching for a woman to sit for the third painting. His married friends Sonny and Cynthia find Tommy, a woman that they think fits Bill's "common" woman image, at a bar during the 1964 Harlem race riots. The class differences between Cynthia and Tommy are immediately palpable. Cynthia is a formally educated middle class social worker who wears an Afro,[253] uses an affected speaking voice, wears coordinated

clothing, and acts superior to the lower class Tommy. Tommy, who is not formally educated, uses common vernacular, wears uncoordinated clothing, is single and wears a wig over her unprocessed hair. Sonny and Cynthia take Tommy to meet Bill. Once they have all been introduced and the men leave to get a meal for Tommy, the two women begin to discuss hair and femininity as Tommy absent-mindedly straightens the room:

> "Leave the room alone. What we need is a little more sex appeal and a little less washing, cooking, ironing. (Tommy puts down the room straightening.) One more thing…do you have to wear that wig?"

Cynthia believes that Tommy would have to remove her wig and stop cleaning in order to have a relationship with Bill. Her question about Tommy's wig emphasizes her middle class sensibilities and critiques Tommy's appearance. I argue that Cynthia's critique can be read as a sign of her sense of powerlessness in society and her desire to punish an African American woman who does not follow the aesthetic sensibilities of the growing Black Power movement, described by Stokely Carmichael as follows:

> Black Power is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society.[254]

Like other markers of African heritage, African Americans' hair became an important source of pride and control over one's body and, on a broader scale, one's life. In this sense, Cynthia's critique of Tommy's wig highlights the continued development of natural hair as a marker for femininity and sex appeal.

Tommy is not prepared, however, to abandon her wig. She responds, "I like how your hair looks. But some of the naturals I don't like. Can see all the lint caught up in the hair like it hasn't been combed since know not when."[255] The larger criticism Tommy

seems to be making is that she does not see the need for one natural hairstyle for all women. Also, since Tommy appears to be the most race-conscious character in the play, I maintain that the wig is not about resembling whites as much as it is about being creative, and making use of bits and pieces allowed to her by society into her idea of functional beauty. [256] Cynthia, in contrast, serves as proof that not everyone who wears their hair natural may be politically astute and/or concerned with racial uplift. I suggest that Childress uses Cynthia's hair politics to challenge racial and gender ideological confines of African American womanhood during the Black power movement. Tommy does not embrace nor outright refuse Cynthia's terms of womanhood; rather she engages her in a dialogue about hair politics. In this sense, Childress puts forth an understanding that African Americans can benefit from discussions about intersections of race and gender in identity performances. Also, through Cynthia and Tommy's dialogue about hair, Childress is commenting on the need for the African American community to eliminate oppressive beliefs and practices that hinder dynamic performances of African American female identity.[257] Working in this capacity, Cynthia's critique of Tommy sends the message that the restrictive beauty standards inscribed on African American women's bodies can sometimes come from other African Americans.

Tommy's feelings for "naturals" also convey the confusion and frustration over how African American women should perform during the Black power movement. In this sense, what troubles Tommy with the movement is the hair with the "lint" in it. In my reading, I liken the "lint" in the Afros to sexism in the Black Power movement.[258] Tommy seems to be saying that an African American woman could wear her hair in a natural and work hard, but yet deal with the "lint" of sexism while also fighting racism.

Kathleen Cleaver notes that women did most of the work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee but held few positions of authority, and that some of the African American male staffers would not view the women as equals.[259] Similarly, Tommy is not certain why she must give up her wig to wear a natural with "lint," or subvert her "functional beauty" so to speak, just so that some African American man can perform as an empowered being. Indeed, for her, a shift would reinforce restrictive gender roles on African American women that are not "natural." Childress seems to be making the claim that Cynthia's elitist performance is problematic for the advancement of the Black power movement ideological shift. The movement's concern is with Black pride, activism, and political consciousness; exploitation, intraracism, and classism undermine the progress of one's performance as a Black nationalist.[260]

The work of Childress, like that of her predecessors Larsen, Fauset, Hurston, Petry, Brooks, and Hansberry underscores the view that African American women's consciousness about hair is varied, and is articulated in a multiplicity of ways.[261] Throughout this chapter, I have tried to examine these articulations and interrogate the role hair plays a role in the (re)thinking of some African American women's self definition and the way they publicly and privately perform their identities. In the following chapter I will interrogate how some African American women writers have used hair to reconceptualize identity performances in post-Black Power movement and contemporary literature.

NOTES

[130] The dates of the Harlem Renaissance have been debated by many scholars. In fact, in an African American women's literature course at Northwestern (1999), Madhu Dubey claimed the period went from 1917 to 1937. She stated that the period ended with

the publication of Zora Neale Hurston's novel: There Eyes Were Watching God. Still others like, Sterling Stuckey, contend that the period ended in 1935.

[131] Alain Locke, ed., The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance (New York: Atheneum, 1992) 254.

[132] The term "New Negro" was used prior to the Harlem Renaissance. In fact, it was used around 1895 and the meaning of the phrase has changed over the years. During the Harlem Renaissance the term refers to individuals who were viewed as "radical" types that insisted upon race pride, group solidarity, and collective action to advance the status of Negroes within American society by agitation and political action as well as economic chauvinism and economic achievement." See August Meier, Negro Thought in America 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971) 302.

[133] See Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984) 154.

[134] Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America (Broadway Books, 1998) 234.

[135] Roger Whitlow, Black American Literature: A Critical History (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1973) 115.

[136] Whitlow 112.

[137] Robert Bone, The Negro Novel in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) 158.

[138] Nancy M. Tischler, "Negro Literature and Classic Form," Contemporary Literature 10.3 (1969):352.

[139] Nella Larsen, Quicksand and Passing (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

[140] Larsen 14.

[141] Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans (New York: Anchor Books, 1992) 41.

[142] Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).

[143] See Chapter 6 in this study for a discussion of real-world assimilative hair performances in 20th century African American popular culture.

[144] Noliwe Rooks, Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1996) 16.

[145] Larsen 14.

[146] Ann duCille, Skin Trade (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 12-13.

[147] Kennell Jackson, "What is Really Happening Here? Black Hair Among African American" in American Culture," Hair in African Art and Culture, eds. Roy. Sieber and Frank. Herreman (New York: Prestel, 2000) 175-185.

[148] While Booker T. Washington advocated assimilation, W.E.B. Dubois famously opposed such an endeavor and made his point clear in a chapter of The Souls of Black Folk entitled "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,"(New York: Avon Books, 1965)240-252. For a more comprehensive discussion of Washington's and Dubois' views on this subject, and other issues, see: August Meier, Negro Thought in

America: Racial Ideologies in the Age Of Booker T. Washington, 1880-1915 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964).

[149] Larsen 35.

[150] Helga's hair was naturally straight.

[151] I am borrowing from Cornel West's argument that African Americans must be endowed with a "cultural armor" to combat the nihilism, meaninglessness, and lovelessness that is so pervasive in their daily lives. See Cornell West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 23.

[152] See Lydia Ann Douglas's film "Nappy: Black Women and the Politics of Hair" where she examines Black women's hair and western ideals of beauty.

[153] See Alain Locke's landmark anthology The New Negro (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992) for a discussion on various efforts of African Americans employed to challenge the legacies of enslavement.

[154] Larsen 6.

[155] Larsen 45.

[156] Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 5-7.

[157] A play on words, denoting both "little man" and a meal made from broken eggs.

[158] Barbara Johnson argues that Helga's inability to "mirror" not only her mother's reflection, but also anyone else she encounters prevents her from being able to perform an identity that she is comfortable with and lives in a community where said performance is not scrutinized. See Barbara Johnson, "The Quicksands of the Self: Nella Larsen and Heinz Kohut," The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race, and Gender (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 37-60.

[159] Larsen 102.

[160] This gap, the lack is also concerned with the absence of the phallus and the desire of the "Other." Lacan 26.

[161] Larsen 70.

[162] Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[163] James F Davis, Who is Black: One Nation's Definition (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) 99.

[164] Naomi Zack, "Different Forms of Mixed Race: Microdiversity and Destablization," Race in 21st Century America, eds. Curtis Stokes, Theresa Melendez, and Gernice Rhodes-Reed (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001) 49-58.

[165] Joel Williams, New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States (New York: Free Press, 1980) 73–75.

[166] Kathy Peiss, "Making Faces: The Cosmetics Industry and the Cultural Construction of Gender, 1890-1930," Unequal Sisters: A Multi-Cultural Reader in U.S. Women's History, eds. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 1994) 372-394.

[167] Such praise about African American woman's hair was reflected in W.E.B. Dubois' Darkwater: Voices from the Veil (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920) 107-8, where he states: "Their beauty,–their dark and mysterious beauty of midnight

eyes, crumpled hair, and soft, full-featured faces . . . . No other women on earth could have merged from the hell of force and temptation which once engulfed and still surrounds black women in America with half the modesty and womanliness that they retain."

[168] Robert A. Hill and Barbara Bair, eds. Marcus Garvey Life and Lessons: A Centennial Companion to The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) xxxix.

[169] Claudia Tate links some African American women's feelings about their hair, beauty, identity with whiteness as the standard of beauty in America. Claudia Tate, Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race (New York: Oxford Press, 1998) 70-72.

[170] Margaret Hunter argues that some African American women attract mates who are interested in women with light skin and long hair and these women have higher educational attainment and make more money. See Margaret Lily Hunter, "Colorstruck: Skin Color Stratification in the Lives of African American Women," Sociological Inquiry 68.4 (1998): 517-535.

[171] Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968)161.

[172] Albeit a limited sample, Cleaver's observations highlight how destructive this type of thinking is for African-American women, especially by members of their own community who seem to have internalized society's messages about African-American physical features and female attractiveness. See K.A. Gainor, "Internalized Oppression as a Barrier to Effective Group work with Black women," Journal for Specialists in Group Work 17 (1992): 2-6.

[173] There is much that is written about African American female identity politics and the impact their hair plays. For additional commentary see Margo Okazawa-Rey, Tracy Robinson, and Janie Victoria Ward, "Black Women and the Politics of Skin Color and Hair," Women and Therapy, 6.1 (1987): 89-91. Additionally, specific attention has been given to African American women's concerns over the role their hair and other features will play in how they perform their identities and how they feel about these performances in their everyday lives. For instance, some African American women worry about the role hair will play when they are selecting or being selected as mates, argue John Hollender and Leslie Schafer, "Male Acceptance of Female Career Roles," Sex Roles: A Journal of Research 7.12 (1981): 1199-1204. For an examination of how hair relates to employment, see Lucy M. Watkins and Lucy Johnston, "Screening Job Applicants: The Impact of Physical Attractiveness and Application Quality," International Journal of Selection and Assessment 8 (2000): 76-84.

[174] Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America (New York: St Martin's Press, 2001) 157-158.

[175] bell hooks. Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self Recovery (Boston: South End Press, 1993) 84.

[176] bell hooks made this point during a conversation we had at a lunch and (later) at a private dinner. Loyola University Chicago: Guest Speaker. 1995.

[177] Lacan 33.

[178] This term refers to what happens when straightened African American hair reverts back to its natural, nappy state. This occurs when hair is exposed to any form of precipitation. Byrd and Tharps 138.

[179] Byrd and Tharps 138.

[180] Byrd and Tharps 138.

[181] Martin Favor, Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 5.

[182] It bears noting that Helga's white Danish relatives are far more concerned with the authenticity of her performance as a Negro than she is. Larsen 67-72.

[183] Larsen 7.

[184] Larsen 38.

[185] Larsen xxxvv

[186] The tragic mulatto figure is a very strong theme in 19th and 20th century American Literature and film.

[187] Larsen 161.

[188] Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, eds. Performing the Body / Performing the Text (New York: Routledge, 1999) 101.

[189] Cherene Johonson-Sherrad, "A Plea for Color: Nella Larsen's Iconography of the Mulatta," American Literature, 76.4. (2004):833-869. See also, Richard Dyer, White (New York: Routledge, 1997) 45.

[190] Larsen 158-99.

[191] Larsen 159.

[192] Larsen 158.

[193] Nell Sullivan, "Ella Larsen's Passing and the Fading Subject," African American Review 32.3 (1998): 373-386. According to Sullivan, some of the other 'things' Clare wanted were love and emotional comfort.

[194]Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988).

[195] Sullivan 375.

[196] Larsen 200.

[197] Larsen. 226.

[198] Larsen 203.

[199] Larsen 203.

[200] Locke 3-16.

[201] Jesse Fauset, Plum Bun: ANovel Without a Moral (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990)14.

[202] Fauset 15.

[203] Fauset 326.

[204] Horton Thornton, "The Beautyshop and Beauty Parlor in Afro-American Literature," Pacific Coast Philology 14 (1979): 76-83.

[205] Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978) 10.

[206] I appreciate Professor Terry's suggestion that that Hurston's "no hairs" could be referring to vaginal hair. In this sense, no hair on a vagina could mean that Teacake might have left Janie for a younger woman.

[207] Hurston 87.

[208] Janie's husband Joe Starks had insisted that Janie keep her hair covered in the store after he saw another man trying to touch her hair. Later, the community speculates about why Janie's hair is covered. Hurston 79.

[209] Hurston 18.

[210] Hurston intimates that Janie "white features" are because Nanny (her owner when she was a slave) and Janie's mother (is raped by a white man) are both sexually exploited by white men, 32-37.

[211] Hurston 211.

[212] Hurston 253.

[213] Hurston 29.

[214] Hurston 45

[215] Hurston 52.

[216] Hurston 52.

[217] Hurston 79.

[218] Hurston 137.

[219] Hurston 157.

[220] Hurston 286.

[221] Janie's combing the dust out of her hair could be construed as an attempt to throw off her past or history, and begin to make new paradigms and performances of identity.

[222]African American women have been marked by their sexuality contends Jones Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

[223] Ann Petry, The Street (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) 2.

[224] Carol E. Henderson, "Walking Wounded: Rethinking Black Women's Identity in Ann Petry's The Street," Modern Fiction Studies 46.4 (2000): 849-867.

[225] Petry 245.

[226] Petry 253.

[227] Petry 253.

[228] Petry 246.

[229] Henderson 858.

[230] Petry 256.

[231] Gwendolyn Brooks, Maud Martha (Chicago: Third World Press, 1953) 53.

[232] Brooks 37.

[233] My argument here is based on the notion that some African Americans have internalized racist ideals about beauty standards and value physical features that closely resemble whites and style their hair according to reflect a style similar to whites. (For historical discussions about assimilationist and nationalist hairstyles see, for instance, Bruce Taylor, "Black Hairstyles: Cultural and Socio-political Implications," Western Journal of Black Studies 14.4 (1990): 235-250; William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs' Black Rage (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Willie Morrow, 400 Years Without a Comb

(San Diego: Black Publishers of San Diego, 1972); Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1982). Such indoctrination has been seen throughout popular culture, most notably in white beauty pageants which until the 1950s ruled that contestants had to be healthy and white. See the film "Miss America," American Experience Public Broadcasting Service, 2002.and Lois W. Banner, American Beauty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 289-90. Interestingly, in one of the earliest African American beauty pageants held by The New Age, a leading African American newspaper, six beauty pageant finalists who had light skin, aquiline features, and long hair were chosen to counter negative images of African Americans. It was not until the 1960s that finalists and winners of such contests resembled African American women with dark shin, full features, and short coarse hair. See Maxine Craig, Ain't I a Beauty Queen: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race (New York: Oxford, 2002).

While my argument at this point in this study focuses on this notion, I do not mean to give the impression that all African Americans value physical features that closely resemble whites. In fact, many African Americans place great value on physical features that characterize people of African ancestry.

[234] Paul and Maud are uncomfortable about the importance of and value of appearance. Brooks 54.

[235] Brooks 52-53.

[236] This passage does not apply to the many African American women who are very proud of their dark skin and "nappy" hair texture.

[237] Nappy hair is "tightly coiled or curled. This type of hair is referred to as "natural" black hair because it is not chemically altered." See, Ingrid Banks, Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Consciousness (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 172.

[238] Banks 29.

[239] The notion of grotesque is rooted in Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque (grotesque) and the understanding that such individuals have the right to be "other" in this world and subvert social hierarchies and normalcy. See Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 159.

[240] Jervis Anderson, This Was Harlem (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981) 337.

[241] Brooks 76.

[242] Brooks 117.

[243] Here I am drawing on Deborah Grayson's contention that certain African American hairstyles like the Afro are a means of demonstrating the wearer's devotion to "Black Power." See Deborah Grayson, "Is it Fake?: Black Women's Hair as Spectacle and Spec(tac)ular," Camera Obscura Collective 36 (1995): 13-31.

[244] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Reading Rhetorical Theory, ed. Barry Brummett (New York: Harcourt, 2000) 879-893.

[245] Virginia MacKenny, "Disjunctive Dialogues – Conversations across Boundaries," Violence-Silence (2000): 35.

[246]Nellie McKay and Henry Louis Gates, eds. Norton Anthology African American Literature (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996) 1747-1748.

[247] McKay and Gates 1748.

[248] Michael Foucault, trans. Richard Howard Madness and Civilization (New York: Pantheon, 1965) 116.

[249] Foucault contends that madness is not absolute and changes over time. In this instance, Hansberry shows that Beneatha has changed as does her sensibility about her hair. McKay and Gates 1755.

[250] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," Technologies of the Self : A Seminar with Michel Foucault, ed. Luther H. Martin Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) 146.

[251] A Raisin in the Sun, dir. Daniel Petrie, perf. Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil, Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1961.

[252] Lisbeth Lipari, "'Fearful of the Written Word': White Fear, Black Writing, and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* Screenplay," Quarterly Journal of Speech 90 (2004): 81-102.

[253] The Afro describes super curly hair of people of African descent. Phillip Hatton, Afro Style: A Salon Handbook (London: Longman Group United Kingdom, 1994) 218.

[254] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) 44.

[255] Childress 20. The Afro as a political hairstyle is also historicized in Robin D. G Kelley's "Nap Time: Historicizing the Afro," Fashion Theory 1.4 (1997): 345.

[256] Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism, Perspectives on Black Women Writers (New York: Pergamon, 1985) 86.

[257] S.M. James and A. P. A. Busia, eds. Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatisim of Black Women (New York: Routledge, 1993) 1-9.

[258] I am grateful to Professor Terry for pointing out that the lint here also refers to Tommy's concern over proper hygiene.

[259] Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rose, and Barbara Woods, eds. Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers 1941-1965 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 197.

[260] Summers argues that "revolution" was not only in the "air", it was also in the natural hairstyles of African Americans. See Barbara Summers, How Black Became Beautiful (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) 60.

[261] Banks 18.

CHAPTER III

INTERROGATING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S HAIR POLITICS AND IDENTITY PERFORMANCES IN POST BLACK POWER MOVEMENT CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

"He likes silky hair."..."Silky hair the color of a penny."

In his seminal collection of essays entitled Shadow and Act, Ralph Ellison muses on the role of the African American writer:

> If the Negro, or any other writer, is going to do what is expected of him, he's lost the battle before he takes the field. I suspect that all the agony that goes into writing is borne precisely because the writer longs for acceptance -- but it must be acceptance on his own terms.[262]

It is also true that during the 1970s many African American women writers pushed for society's acceptance of their preferred hair/beauty aesthetic and nurtured the hope that their cultural production would offer more realistic and complex (re)presentations of African American female identity performances.[263] This chapter will examine the work of Toni Morrison (Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, and Jazz), Shirley Anne Williams (Dessa Rose), Alice Walker (The Color Purple), Gloria Naylor (Mama Day), Andrea Lee (Sarah Philips), Aliona L. Gibson (Nappy: Growing Up Black and Female in America), Judy Scales-Trent (Notes of a White Black Woman: Race Color Community), Sonsyrea Tate (Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam), Danzy Senna (Caucasia), Rebecca Walker (Black, White, and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self), Marita Golden (Don't Play in the Sun), and Emily Raboteau (The Professor's Daughter), all of which use hair to (re)consider the dynamic performance of African American women's identities. I will argue that from the post black power movement to the present, some African America women have used hair as a signifier for the abject, beauty, modesty, mysticism, self-love,

transgressive and ugliness to (re)think how some African American women perform an aspect of their identity. I will utilize performance theory to demonstrate that identity is dynamic and fluid, rather static in these fictional and non-fictional writings.

Toni Morrison's post-Black Power Movement narrative The Bluest Eye uses hair as a trope for beauty[264] and the abject. Morrison explores highlights the issue of beauty in The Bluest Eye to the politics of African American beauty and identity in the 1960s in the afterword to the novel:

> the reclamation of racial beauty in the sixties stirred these thoughts [about beauty], made me think about the necessity for the claim. Why, although reviled by others, could this beauty not be taken for granted within the community?.... The assertion of racial beauty [in the novel] was (...) against the damaging internalization of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze.[265]

At its core Morrison's novel promotes a refusal to embrace internalized negative notions about African American beauty and identity. Morrison does this by carefully laying out how some African American women's hair is a trope for beauty, desirability, and ugliness within in the African American community.[266]

One significant character in The Bluest Eye is Maureen Peal, a fair skinned, long haired beauty in the African American community who, like Helga in Larsen's Quicksand, represses the performance of her natural identity. At Lacan's mirror stage, [267] Maureen does not mark the separation between herself and that which is not herself (read: Darker skinned African American community). Instead, Maureen comes to learn that she is a fragmented self (aesthetically straddling the fence of African American and white), albeit with a little more aesthetic currency allotted from a white aesthetic standard—though by this standard Maureen is only relatively less ugly, but not truly beautiful.[268]

This is evident in Maureen's taunting of Pecola and Claudia where she sereams: "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute."[269] Maureen's "I" reflects Laean's notion that "I" is a projection, a construction, or ultimately something other than the still ineffable "self."[270] In this case Maureen's hair serves to show how others' discussions of beauty and race can become part of an individual's construetion and performanee of self. In fact, one of the narrators in the novel is nine year old Claudia MacTeer, who at one of her most fecund points of development has not yet internalized the self hatred that some African Americans have. When Claudia is given a white doll at Christmas, she is perplexed, and muses:

> "What was I suppose to do with it? Pretend I was its mother?"

Later she reveals a secret:

> "I destroy white baby dolls."[271]

She continues:

> "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, windows signs---all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it."[272]

Between the confusion about earing for the doll, mutilating the white dolls, and at the same time resisting whiteness as the standard for beauty, Claudia funetions as an individual that is practicing either self love or self-hatred resulting from the internalized racism that attempts to make her feel ugly. Thus, Claudia actively displaces whiteness at the center of her eonsciousness for beauty and for life. In fact, while contemplating what to do with the white doll, Claudia ruminates on what would happen if her parents had asked what she wanted for Christmas:

> I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone. The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward.[273]

In these excerpts Morrison illustrates that a child can see that adults have subverted their own cultural and family traditions with practices of material consumption and by embracing whiteness as the standard of value and beauty. Moreover, her desire highlights the partial survival of alternative standards that Morrison sees as under siege by modern consumer culture.

As Morrison considers how light skin and long, straight hair are tropes for beauty for some African American women, she also establishes how (among these women and in some areas of society) African American women's dark skin and short, nappy hair are tropes for perceived ugliness (Pecola). Throughout the entire novel Morrison indicts African Americans (and society at large) for internalizing racist ideology. In Morrison, some African Americans' feelings of self-loathing about their bodies and selves represent the abject. In the Powers of Horror Julia Kristeva refers to the abject as:

> The abjection is one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable ... the abject disturbs identity, system, order.[274]

The abject as reflected in Morrison's novel is the self loathing that is so pervasive among her characters. As prefigured in racist ideology, the abject suggests that African American women are ugly and need to use a white female normative as the standard when constructing their identities. Adopting this standard subsequently disrupts their identities. Here, I suggest that Pauline's hair represents the abject, and her attempts to

straighten it represent a loss of self. She desires to get rid of the African American part of herself (her natural hair) so that she can perform a close approximation of a white female identity.

The subject matter of Morrison's novel is alarming because just a short decade after the Black Power movement,[275] some African American women shifted back to straightening their hair. That is to say, the natural hairstyles declined and straight hairstyles were showcased in African American women's magazines. This is supported by images that appear in African American magazines where African American women were featured. For Morrison, this straightened hair worn during the "Black is Beautiful" period in African American history illustrates the pervasive abjection that she believes is widespread and manifested not only through self-loathing but also in how African American women's minds, bodies, and hair are still oppressed.[276] This abjection is reflected in many of Morrison's characters, particularly Pauline and her daughter Pecola. When the newly wedded Pauline moves North with husband Cholly, she is snubbed by other African American women because she does not straighten her hair.[277] Their snobbery and exclusion cause Pauline to seek refuge in the movies. However, while watching the movies, she becomes enraptured by the beauty of the white actresses' hair and (like the African American women who criticized her unstraightened hair) wants to emulate white women's hair aesthetic. Her straightened hair begins her final descent into the abject, as defined by Barbara Creed:

> The place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not. The abject threatens life, it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self. [278]

Pauline's straightening of her hair is an expression of abjection and it is the final downward shift that moves Pauline from her relative healthy performance as an African American woman who likes herself to that of one who is repulsed by her own identity. Morrison offers a particularly troubling instance of Pauline's final shift which occurs when she is at the movies:

> Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I don't know. I 'member one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked just like her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, I sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time. I thought I'd see it through to the end again, and I got up to get me some candy. I was sitting back in my seat, and I taken a big bite of that candy, and it pulled a tooth right out of my mouth. I could of cried. I had good teeth, not a rotten one in my head. I don't believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly. [279]

Pauline's abjection of self illustrates the identification of the want, in this case to style her hair in a manner that approximates the white movie star on whom her identity is based. This passage underscores how Pauline often anchored her identity on the slippery surface of physical beauty.[280] When Pauline is unable to perform via her hairstyle as a white woman, her want is illuminated by the agonizing understanding that she will never be able to perform a white normative female standard of beauty.[281] Such a performance is undermined by its associated disgust and desire. On the notion of disgust, Stallybrass and White assert:

> It has been argued that 'the demarcating imperative' divides up human and non-human, society and nature, 'on the basis of the simple logic of excluding filth. Differentiation, in other words, is dependent upon disgust. The division of the social into high and low, the polite and the vulgar simultaneously maps out divisions between the civilized and the grotesque body, between author and hack, between social purity and the social

> formation, topography and the body, in such a way that subject identity cannot be considered independently of those domains. The bourgeois subject continuously defined and redefined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as 'low'—as dirty, repulsive, noisy, and contaminating. Yet that the very act of exclusion was constitutive of its identity. The low was internalized under the sign of negation and disgust. But disgust always bears the imprint of disgust.[282]

I argue that Pauline's disgust leads to her undoing and, ultimately, a performance of a negative aesthetic / self loathing. Pauline also learns through watching movies and magazines to desire whiteness. This desire, or what Lacan would call "object petit a," which here, refers to the desire to be the normative white female standard that appears to surround many African Americans.[283] Thus, Pauline styles her hair in a style similar to the women she sees on the screen, and they become the lure of her desire and ultimate performance.[284] Pauline's performance, however, is destined to fail for several reasons. First, Pauline's performance always fails because it is not constitutive; her hair in this state deviates from her "natural" and "true" hair texture. Pauline's inability to replicate their example of beauty has a profoundly negative effect on her identity and psyche.[285] Second, Pauline's performance fails because of her never-ending abjection, which highlights the disordered nature of her African American female body, and illuminates her delicate and unstable identity performance. Pauline's abjection stems in part from images in dominant culture, of white women, which are so pervasive and constant that they have over powered the images of African American in popular culture.[286] Moreover, many of the images presented within African American culture as examples of beauty are merely browner versions of a normative white aesthetic. [287]Some of the African American community has internalized this racism and actively participates in its perpetuation.

Morrison demonstrates other examples of the abject in the lives of Pauline and Pecola. Claudia, the nine year old who narrates part of Pecola's tale, recalls Mr. Henry (a boarder) who tried to charm her and her sister Frieda by calling them "Greta Garbo" and "Ginger Rogers." It is an indicator that Mr. Henry links them with white beauties rather than African American beauties such as Ella Fitzgerald or Ethel Waters. I suggest that Mr. Henry's nicknames for the girls say more about his internalized racism than it does of them. These instances reveal that the abject is not a foregone conclusion, and thus an alternate performance is needed. Morrison underscores this point when she has Claudia reject and destroy the white dolls she is given as a Christmas gift.[288] This rejection demonstrates how Claudia is the only character that unconsciously works to interrogate the ideology of white society; this is evident in her destruction of the dolls[289] Claudia's refusal to wholeheartedly embrace whiteness as the standard for beauty runs counter to the manner in which adults in her family and community fawn over both white beauty and light skinned African American children like Maureen Peal.[290] Claudia's rejection of most[291] things white is lost on someone like Pauline who is unable to reject the white aesthetic:

> Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another---physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap.[292]

Pauline clearly identifies with the white, western notion of beauty,[293] and attempts to replicate the aesthetic of Jean Harlow. This performance might have been vaguely possible if Pauline had the light skin, long hair, and green eyes of Maureen Peal. However, her abject status prevents her from performing the normative white female

aesthetic. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life that are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject.[294] In the abject, Pauline is unable to perform because she has lost the distinction between herself and Harlow (her normative white female standard). This abjection has disturbed who Pauline thought she was and forced her to accept the world's disregard for her inadequate performance of white beauty. The abject prevents Pauline from doing anything other than "settling down to just being ugly." Pauline's loss of her tooth produces a reaction (of horror) that registers not only the abject, but signals the jarring breakdown between Pauline and the normative white female beauty standard.

Pauline inscribes her profoundly negative idea of beauty onto her newborn. Pauline recalls that Pecola "looked like a black ball of hair."[295] Pauline continues,

> But Pecola look like she knowed right off what to do. A right smart baby she was. I used to like to watch her. You know they makes them greedy sounds. Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly. [296]

In this moment when Pauline looks at her child she sees in essence her own "ugly" reflection. Here, Pauline's (and Pecola's) experience elicits a bizarre instance of the mirror stage (which typically only happens to children). Also, Pecola's initial experience with the lack produced by the mirror stage is seen through her mother's declaration that she was ugly. Later Pecola encounters another experience of her perceived ugliness when she enters the store to purchase some candy. Morrison writes,

> She pulls off her shoe and takes out the three pennies. The gray head of Mr. Yacobowski looms up over thé counter. He urges his eyes out his thoughts to encounter her. Blues eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indiana summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he

> senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible not to say desirable or necessary. [297]

In this example, it is clear what a little black girl with her hair and tattered clothing *lacks*—whiteness, beauty, and value as a person. [298]

Morrison describes another disturbing instance as Pecola stares into the mirror:

> As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret if the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. [299]

In this instance Pecola's looking in the mirror summons Lacan's "symbolic stage," which allows her to look at herself as the racist would look at her. In Pecola's first negative remarks about her hair from her mother, Pecola's hair signifies a trope of ugliness to underscore the belief that racist attitudes which some African American women have internalized and have damaged healthy identity formation of many African American young girls.[300]

Like Morrison, some other African American women writers also use hair as a means to challenge unhealthy (mis)representations and to (re)think how hair has been employed to perform an aspect of some African American women's identities. For example, during the 1980s, the novels of Shirley Anne Williams, Andrea Lee, and Gloria Naylor continue to use African American women's hair as a signifier. In Dessa Rose, Williams tells the story of a runaway slave (Dessa) who attacks the slave owner that murdered her husband. While on the run, Dessa encounters Nehemiah, an individual of

ambiguous heritage who is creating a study guide for slave owners. Nehemiah's "nappy yellow hair" marks him as other. On the one hand, Nehemiah could be white; however, he could also be Italian, Jewish, or even African American capable (by virtue of his hair and skin color) of performing as any of those other racial and ethnic classifications. The whiteness of Nehemiah's skin and other features (including the coarseness of his hair) do not give the whites he works for pause because he works so diligently to help them oppress the enslaved Africans.[301] This enables him to perform as a white man, and helps to insure that no one questions his dubious racial background. Yet, on the other hand, Nehemiah, with his "nappy yellow" hair, could be an African American performing as a white man.

Williams also employs hair as a sign for hatred. For instance, when Dessa Rose encounters the red haired white woman Rufel, loathing rises to the surface:

> Dessa had seen all before. She watched the white woman sitting in the light from the long window. Her hair was the color of fire; it fell about her shoulders in lank wisps. Her face was very white and seemed to radiate a milky glow; her mouth was like a bloody gash across it.[302]

In this excerpt Williams does not have her protagonist mythologize the white woman's skin and hair. Instead, she looks upon the white woman and literally sees blood. On the other hand, Williams uses African American hair and hair combing rituals as a signifier of family, comfort, self-love, and pleasure:

> I missed this when I was sold away from home.---- "Turn your head, honey; I only got two more left to do." ----The way the womens in the Quarters used to would braid hair. Mothers would braid children heads---girl and boy---until they went into the field or for as long as they had them. This was one way we told who they peoples was, by how they hair was combed. Mammy corn rowed our hair---mines and Carrie's----though she generally wore plaits herself, two big ones that stuck out like pigtails over her ears. My fingers so stiff now, I can't do much more than plait, but

> I learned all kinds---corn row, seed braid, chain, thread wrap. After we got up in age some girls would sometimes gather and braid each other's heads...Child learn a lot of things setting between some grown person's legs, listening at grown peoples speak over they hands. This is where I frist learned to listen, right there between mammy's thighs, where I first learned to speak, from listening at grown peoples talk... First, time Ada braided my hair there at the Glen---her hands, her legs, the feel of the chair rung at my back, the woman scent rising faint behind my head---I membered so many other times between other knees, the feel of other hands in my hair; I cried. Ada rocked my head on her knee, pet my shoulder; finished up braid and went on to another... She didn't too much like fooling with no one's head; kept her own hair short under that bandana and never combed Annabelle's. Oh, she washed it now, and rinsed it in flower water, but you couldn't get neither one to put a comb to it; put her too much in mind of how she'd had to dress her mistress' head. She could fair turn your stomach talking about white folks' hair, way it flew every which-a-way; said it smelt like dog fur when it got wet. So Ada only combed my head a few times, just till I got strong enough to where I could do it myself. I don't say this to fault her. Slavery had sucked Ada about dry; what was left was tied up in Annabelle. That was her blossom, her flower.... No, I wouldn't press Ada about no hair; Debra was always glad to braid so we did each other's. Flora and Janet got so they'd come round and have they heads braided now and then. This seemed to make us more respectable, something go wrong, Ada take to cleaning house I get to braiding hair. It do give me pleasure. Simple as it sound, just the doing of it, the weaving of one strand with the other, have seen me through some pretty terrible days...[303]

This passage illuminates the ritual of hair dressing as many African American women have encountered it. Williams reveals that formerly enslaved Ada could wash some of the women's hair in their community, but could hardly comb their hair because it reminded her of caring for her former mistress.

Also, by situating the ritual of hair combing as a means of giving pleasure to Dessa, Williams offers a view of hair combing not completely mired in the idea of self loathing. In this way, Williams's novel functions as a counter narrative in a world that does not value African American women. Williams's heroine uses hair as a means to weave together strands of memories. The children learn how to comb hair so that they

have a skill to make a living, communicate, learn about their families, history, and culture and how to navigate the world.[304] Hair therefore also signifies for the enslaved a safe and comfortable place where they belong to their families rather than the slave owners. In addition, hair also serves as trope for African American cultural nationalism.[305] Specifically, I am arguing that when Dessa and the other women come together in this ritualistic space, they do so with pride to identify with their racial group. In this manner, as Dessa and the others care for their hair they also labor to (re)establish their African American cultural identity.[306]

Furthermore, during this time of comfort, Dessa Rose and the other females learn to love African American bodies, hair, share conversations, closeness, and community regardless of their age. Moreover, while African American women have their hair combed they learn to establish bonds and about the power of silences and speech, such that their voices are valued even during slavery. That is to say, African American women in this work celebrate African American women's hair as a thing of beauty and white hair a sign of the undesirable, something that is sickening and unattractive.[307] Public and private beauty rituals/shops function as spaces where some African American women have their hair cared for and resist internalized gendered racism. In particular, these spaces serve to challenge the excessive fetishization of white female normative beauty standards. These hair rituals/shops also provide an environment to provide a comfortable and relaxing space for some African American women. They also function as conduct text for younger patrons on how to behave and how not to behave, as well as provide snippets on topics such as: money, men, white people, advice and gossip.[308] Ultimately, in Dessa Rose, Williams inverts the dominant culture's beauty aesthetic, allowing what

she believes is the true signifier of beauty of African American women's hair be the standard for Dessa.

This inverted aesthetic of Dessa Rose is also evident in Alice Walker's The Color Purple when Celie, the protagonist, sees a photograph of Shug Avery for the first time. Celie describes Shug's hair as looking like "somethin' tail,"[309] an animal quality that connotes wildness. Hair is a trope for the transgressive[310] that does not conform to racial and gender norms. For Shug to gain control over her identity performances she has to configure her body/hair as she sees fit, and in doing so she becomes a transgressive figure. As such, Shug's hair serves as a sign of a wild African American blues woman trying to perform as a free woman. Shug's "tail" like hair also signifies her refusal to conform to society's racist and sexist sensibilities. Shug does not mother her children, travels when and where she wants (without a male chaperone), and has sexual affairs with single men as well as married men and women.[311] Such a woman does whatever she wants with her body.

Walker also uses hair to serves as a signifier for the sexual exploitation of African American women through the example of the character "Squeak" (Mary Agnes), who is held up as a beauty in the novel because of her nearly white appearance. Some of the community encourage her lover Harpo to permit Squeak to sing at his new club because she will attract male customers. For instance, Shug notes, "you dress Mary Agnes up the right way and you'll make piss pots of money. Yellow like she is, stringy hair and cloudy eyes, the men'll be crazy bout her."[312] Squeak's white looking skin and hair allow her to meet with the policeman (her white uncle) to discuss getting Sofia released from jail. (She is sexually assaulted by this same man.)[313] In this sense, Squeak's hair is a reminder

that generations of African American women were sexually exploited by white men, leaving not only the hurt of the rape, but sometimes a child as a reminder of the sexual abuse.

Walker also uses hair as a sign of multifarious love. One night, while sleeping with Shug, Celie discusses her early love for cutting hair:

> I did love to cut hair, I say to Shug, since I was a little bitty thing. I'd run go git the scissors if I saw hair coming, and I'd cut and cut, long as I could.[314]

However, her passion for cutting hair is problematized when her stepfather forces her to cut his hair after he rapes her:

> But one time when mama not at home, he come. Told me he want me to trim his hair. He bring the scissors and comb and brush and a stool. While I trim his hair he look at me funny. He a little nervous too, but I don't know why, till he grab hold of me and cram me up tween his legs.

She continues,

> It hurt me, you know, I say. I was just going on fourteen. I never even thought bout men having nothing down there so big. It scare me just to see it. And the way it poke itself and grow. Shug so quiet I think she sleep. After he through, I say, he make me finish trimming his hair. [315]

Walker continues,

> After a while I say, Mama finally ast how come she find his hair in the girls room if he don't never go in there like he say. That when he told her I had a boyfriend. Some boy he say he seen sneaking out the back door. It the boy's hair, he say, not his. You know how she love to cut anybody's hair, he say.[316]

These passages show that Celie's love of cutting hair is tainted by her stepfather's violation of her innocence and his slandering her character and reputation in the eyes of her mother. In another instance, Celie's love of hair is further altered when she is forced to care for her new husband's children's hair:

> Dear God,
>
> I spend my wedding day running from the oldest boy. He twelve. His mama died in his arms and he don't want to hear nothing about no new one. He pick up a rock and laid open my head. The blood run all down tween my breasts. His daddy say Don't *do* that! But that's all he say. He got four children, instead of three, two boys and two girls. The girls hair ain't been comb since their mammy died. I tell him that I'll have to shave it off. Start fresh. He say bad luck to cut a woman's hair. So after I bandage my head best I can and cook dinner—they have a spring, not a well, and a wood stove look like a truck---I start trying to untangle hair. They only six and eight and they cry. They scream. They cuse me of murder.[317]

Here, combing hair is one of the many never-ending chores Celie has to do. Ultimately, Celie's love for hair is resurreeted through her love for Shug Avery.

> Dear God,
> Shug Avery sit up in bed a little today. I wash and comb out her hair. She got the nottiest, shortest, kinkiest hair I ever saw, and I love every strand of it. The hair that come out in my comb I kept. Maybe one day I'll get a net, make me a rat to pomp up my own hair.[318]

The process of lovingly caring for Shug's hair subverts the previous negative memories of being thought promiscuous by her mother and caring for Mr._____'s violent and unkempt children's hair. Here, Walker uses hair as a sign of love between women. Celie's desires to keep a lock of Shug's hair and fashion it into a small wig to attach to her own hair is reminiscent of saving a lover's lock of hair in a keepsake. Celie's love and care for Shug and her hair also inspires Shug to write a blues song.[319]

Celie gently washes Shug's hair in the spirit of love, braids it with the hope that it will grow,[320] and later straightens it upon Shug's request. The growth of hair is significant here because it embodies the development of these women's relationship. Celie takes care of Shug's hair, and Shug begins to feel better about herself and her appearance. A friendship develops. Shug reciprocates by helping Celie grow as a

woman.[321] One way she helps Celie feel better about herself is to have Celie look at her vagina. Celie thinks that her vagina is ugly and does not think that the hair on her body adds anything positive to it. Moreover, Celie is disgusted by the negative experiences associated with her vagina; specifically, the rape by her step father, the loss of her children (by-products of the rapes), and the unloving and forceful way she and Mr. ____ have sexual intercourse. Yet, Shug helps Celie see that the hair on both her head and her vagina is beautiful.[322] When Shug has Celie look at her vagina she is daring her to love herself and her body, and see herself differently. Moreover, after examining her vagina Celie and Shug fondle and lick each other's breasts and later share in Celie' first sexual experience that is gentle and loving.[323] Later, Shug helps her discover Nettie's hidden letters. Celie reads the letters and learns of her sister's travels and the development of her children, and begins to resist Mr._____'s influence. Thus, Celie's transgressive love for Shug provides a space for transformation that reflects bell hooks' notion of transgressive transformations:

> Making a space for the transgressive image, the outlaw rebel vision, is essential to any effort to create a context for transformation. And, even then little progress is made if we transform images without shifting paradigms, changing perspectives, ways of looking.[324]

These moments illustrate that African American women's hair is a sign for love and the transgressive, both of which help some African American women perform an aspect of their identity and resist racial and gendered confines established by society.

Like Walker, Gloria Naylor also uses the space and process of hair care ritual to highlight the transgressive in her novel Mama Day. Naylor's Mama Day is the story of Cocoa, a young woman determined to merge her contemporary values with the traditions of generations of enslaved ancestors on the Georgia Sea island of Willow Springs. Here,

Naylor uses hair as a signifier for mysticism.[325] In this manner, Naylor has Ruby, a conjure woman, use hair to work magic—allowing her to straddle the physical world and the celestial world.

In one notable example Naylor has Frances, the desperate former lover of Junior Lee, to try to get her man Junior Lee back from Ruby, a local conjure woman. Frances uses some of her's and Junior Lee's hair to work a "root" (spell) designed to get him to return to their home.[326] Frances does not know how to perform this ritual; thus, she is unsuccessful in getting Junior Lee to leave Ruby. Ruby, however, is apt at performing such rituals. As we approach the end of the novel, Junior Lee pulls down Cocoa's halter top, and when Ruby appears he tells her that the incident was Cocoa's fault. Ruby believes him, and decides to work a root on the innocent Cocoa.[327] Naylor presents a vivid image of the process:

> Ruby uses the white twine. White goes with any color dress, she tells Cocoa. She moves her hands along the temples to get the shape of the head before making the first part. A straight part downs the middle, north and south. The teeth of the comb dig in just short of hurting as she scratches the scalp showing through the parted hair before she dips her fingers into the round jar and massages the warm solution down its length. The second big part crosses the first, going east to west, and this time she dips her fingers into a square jar, massaging hard. North and south, east to west, round to square. The braids start forming, tiny and crisscrossed under her flying fingers. They drop like a fan on top of Cocoa's shoulders as Ruby knots the white thread on each end. Done, Ruby tells her, and Cocoa asks for a mirror. There ain't none inside worth using, but go on home and see how pretty it is. She cleans out the comb one final time and gives Cocoa a match to burn up her loose hair. Before she goes Cocoa leans down and kisses Ruby on the cheek. Ruby is still smiling as she watches Cocoa head back down the road. She caps her jars and presses the lids on tight. She then brushes a few strands from her lap into her hand and puts them in her pocket. [328]

Ruby uses hair as part of a ritual that would stop Cocoa from living in the physical world and have her exist among the dead in the ancestral world. In another example, Naylor uses the combing/braiding of hair which embodies the superstitions of the community even as it gives comfort:

> Twenty years melted away under her fingers as she sectioned and braided my hair. She'd comb, pull, and loop giving me the loose strands caught in the teeth of the comb. A gentle nudge and I knew to bend my head, turn it to the left or right. Tight braids. So tight they pinched my scalp up along the temples and nape. Always tight braids to last for two or three days of school. And my palm coming up for the loose strands of hair. A ball of hair in my hands to be burned when we through. A bird will take it and make a nest----you'll have headaches all your life. All unspoken and by rote. I felt a void when she was done. A thank you meant hearing my own voice, older and deeper; a walk back home to pass you on a ladder fixing shutters; a need to pretend that stony face didn't matter.[329]

These excerpts shows how Ruby combed Cocoa's hair and made her feel cared for and comfortable in the process. African American woman's hair combing is a task typically reserved for women;[330]a mother, aunt, sister, and in some cases a female in one's community would take on this responsibility as Ruby did with Cocoa. This combing ritual teaches young African American woman intimacy and how women typically care for each other. Many African American women have experienced this ritual.[331] Cocoa is motherless: she has aunts, but they do not comb her hair. Hence, she finds sisterhood and comfort with Ruby. This passage also reveals one of the commonly known superstitions held by some Blacks: if a bird gets your hair it will make it part of its nest, making life rough for the hair's owner. For this reason, the owner is given the hair that feels out in the combing process, and it is usually burned so that no will be able to use it for sinister purposes, such as working spells on the owner's hair. [332] This point is important for

Naylor's heroine Cocoa. It is important because if Cocoa had taken the strands of loose hair, Ruby's "spell" on Cocoa would not have worked.

While Naylor uses hair as a signifier for mysticism, other contemporaries like Toni Morrison use hair as signifiers of the discuss nuances of some African American women's identities and lives. In her 1977 novel, Song of Solomon, Morrison uses hair as a trope for an "emergent woman,"[333] masking, self-loathing, independence, miracles, unruliness, and unity (dependence). Morrison uses hair as a way of presenting her own standard of beauty for African American women in this novel. She revisits the hair trope of self-loathing to examine the pressures for some African American women to depend on white beauty standards in the (re)construction of their identities. The discussion of hair politics in Song of Solomon centers primarily on two female characters: Pilate Dead and her granddaughter Hagar Dead. Pilate Dead, who yearns to situate herself in the world on her own terms, wears her hair close to her scalp:

> Although she was hampered by huge ignorances, but not in any way unintelligent, when she realized what her situation in the world was and would probably always be she threw away every assumption she had learned and began at zero. First off, she cut her hair. That was one thing she didn't want to have to think about anymore. Then she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her. When am I happy and when am I sad and what is the difference? What do I need to know to stay alive? What is true in the world? [334]

Pilate's hair is a sign of an "emergent woman" who discards previous suppositions for her life. Her "hair" has contributed to the development of the self she is trying to replace. Having discarded it, Pilate is able to perform a new self and present it to the world. Morrison appears to be using Pilate's new world and body order to say that a new hair aesthetic must be established that allows African American women to perform in way

that celebrates their beauty. She revisits this point when Pilate's granddaughter experiences a psychological meltdown. Pilate would then become independent of all the assumptions society has inscribed on her African American female body; she becomes "an eccentric black body."[335] As a rare[336] but revolutionary symbol of female beauty Pilate's shaved head allows her to think less about the role hair plays in her oppression and focuses on trying to help her family namely her granddaughter navigate the racist, sexist, and class conscious world in which they exist.[337]

While Pilate's rebirth allows her to (re)conceptualize her hair and world, her granddaughter Hagar has no such experience. Hagar's obsession with the color and texture of hair echoes Mary Helen Washington's contention that African American women writers explore a recurring theme of politics of skin color and hair:

> The subject of black women's physical beauty occurs with such frequency in the writing of black women indicates they have been deeply affected by the discrimination against the shade of their skin and the texture of their hair. In almost every novel and autobiography written by a black woman, there is at least one incident in which the dark-skinned girl wishes to be either white or light skinned with "good hair."[338]

Hagar is the most insecure female character in Morrison's novel even though her mother Reba and grandmother Pilate dote on her and try and give her as many of life's comforts that they can afford.[339] Regardless of their efforts, Hagar still feels uncomfortable and her fixation with her hair and vanity weighs her down. Like her biblical namesake[340] she wanders around town feeling abandoned by Milkman (her lover and second cousin) and goes mad.[341] Ultimately, her hair becomes a visible[342] mark of madness in her life with its roots in childhood. As a small child Hagar's hair masks functions as a way of not revealing her true self to others, not even family. At the age of four[343] Hagar wore her

hair in four long braids, like two horns over each ear, like two tails at the back of her neck.[344] This description of Hagar's hair conceals the innocence of her youth and instead presents the image of a devilish individual and also reveals a bit of foreshadowing of behavior to come. Indeed, as a young adult, Hagar sits with her would-be cousin lover Milkman, who tries to figure out who she is among the women in their family. Milkman observes that Hagar's large and wild mass of unstyled hair again prevents others from truly seeing who she is.[345] Hagar performs as an insane individual, blaming her hair and the hair of others for the demise of her sexual relationship with her cousin. For example, Hagar becomes angry after receiving Milkman's note which ends their relationship. She becomes even angrier when she later spies Milkman with a woman whose "silky copper-colored hair cascaded over the sleeve of his coat."[346] Hagar begins to hate her own hair that does not conjure images of whiteness and becomes so obsessed with ending Milkman's new relationship with the "silky copper-colored" haired woman that she decides to kill him. Hagar's hair becomes a signifier for self loathing. As Hagar stalks Milkman, her uncombed hair resembles a thundercloud,[347] signifying unruliness[348] and insanity.[349]

Hagar's hair also serves as a trope for miracles. When Hagar is unable to kill Milkman, she becomes convinced that her hair performance will be the miracle which will reunite them. As Hagar stares into her mirror, she sees herself as the racist world sees her and internalizes that image. She decides that a makeover will help her to subvert the racist and self-loathing image that is reflected from the mirror. She starts out to clean her hair at home, but decides that her miracle performing hair needs professional care. She goes to the beauty shop unannounced, and she convinces the beautician to help her

complete a miraculous transformation that will vex Milkman and cause him to love her again. The beautician hesitantly agrees to style Hagar's hair. The women in the beauty shop believe that Hagar is so obsessed with her hair and using it to please Milkman, that they would risk their lives if they refused to help her. Yet, the miracle hair appointment Hagar arranges never occurs. She gets caught in the rain; her new purchases get drenched and fall to the ground, as does her freshly washed hair. When she returns home and sees herself she feels as though her hair may not be able to perform the much-desired miracle. Despairing, Hagar engages in conversation with her mother:

> "Why don't he like my hair?" Who, baby? Who don't like your hair?" "Milkman." "Milkman does too like your hair," said Reba. "No. He don't. But I can't figure out why. Why he never liked my hair." Of course he likes it. How can he not like it," asked Pilate. "He likes silky hair." Hagar was murmuring so low they had to bend down to hear her. "Silky hair? Milkman?" "He don't like hair like mine." "Hush, Hagar." "Silky hair the color of a penny." "Don't talk, baby." "Curly, wavy, silky hair. He don't like mine." Pilate put her hand on Hagar's head and trailed her fingers through her granddaughter's soft damp wool. "How can he not love your hair?" "How can he not love your hair? It's the same hair that grows out of his own armpits. The same hair that crawls up out of his crotch on up his stomach. All over his chest. The very same. It grows out of his nose, over his lips, and if he ever lost his razor, it would grow all over his face. It's all over his head, Hagar. It's his hair too. He got to love it. "He don't love it at all. He hates it." "No, he don't. He don't know what he loves, but he'll come around honey, one of these days. How can he love himself and hate your hair?" "He loves silky hair." "Hush, Hagar." "Penny-colored hair."[350]

This passage illustrates the tension between hair tropes of self-love and self-loathing for both Hagar and Milkman. It is notable that Morrison describes Hagar's hair as "soft damp wool," using racist animal imagery[351] associated with the hair of some African Americans, and subverting it through Pilate's caress an description of it as soft (as opposed to hard and/or coarse). Also, through Pilate's question, "How can he love himself and hate your hair," Morrison is saying that performance of African American

self-love involves loving the entire self. One who claims to love himself or herself cannot look at another member of their community and hate their bodies and hair. Here, Morrison is trying to establish via hair politics and performance both a new aesthetic that celebrates African American hair that is not constructed in comparison to a white female normative standard. Thus, Morrison pleads for hair politics which allows for healthy identity performances. Finally, Morrison uses hair as a symbol of ancestral legacy:

> "If I bury Papa, I guess I ought to bury this too—somewhere." She looked back at Milkman. "No, he said. "No. Give it here." When he went home, that evening, he walked into the house on Not Doctor Street with almost none of the things he'd taken with him. But he returned with a box of Hagar's hair.[352]

This conversation between Pilate and Milkman about Pilate's father and Milkman's grandfather occurs at the end of the novel, and it highlights hair as a trope for ancestral legacy. The hair in the box signals an emphasis on family union that Milkman has lost in his madness, and negates the theme of rootlessness that is so pervasive in this novel. In the final analysis, Morrison uses hair to contemplate African American female identity, strained family relations, racism, and internalized racism.

Unlike Morrison, Andrea Lee "rejects the values of African Americans historical past and promise of a new life."[353] However, like Morrison, Lee does examine the complexities of hair and identity politics in Sarah Philips. In that work Lee tells the story of an African American bourgeoisie young woman and her apolitical hair politics. Lee's heroine Sarah is a fair skinned African American Harvard graduate who dates white men almost exclusively, runs away from her parents, and flees her homeland of America for France. While living in France Sarah tries to perform as a *petite bourgeois noir*, where she can

date white men with hope that race will not matter, but her hair and skin disproves that notion. Consider the following exchange with Henri (her boyfriend) and his friends:

> "Americans don't pay attention to little things like the color of their clothes," remarked Roger nastily, brushing a thread from the sleeve of his immaculate tweed jacket. "Or the style of their hair. Sarah, ma vielle, you're certainly pretty enough, but why don't you put your hair up properly? Or cut it off? You have the look of a savage!"[354]

Lee continues,

> Henri giggled and grabbed my frizzy ponytail. "She is a savage" he exclaimed with the delighted air of a child making a discovery. "A savage from the shores of Mississippi!" (He pronounced "Mississippi" with the accent on the last syllable. In the sunlight through the window, Henri looked very fair-haired and well fed. His round face, like that of a troublemaking cherub, was flushed with malicious energy; I could tell he was enormously pleased to be annoying me, and that he wouldn't let me off easily. "I am going to go see Alan," I said, and started to get up, but Henri held on to my hair and pulled me back. "Don't go anywhere, darling," he said. "I want to tell Roger all about your elegant pedigree." "Tell him about yours!" I said rashly, forgetting that Henri was illegitimate. Roger gave a thin squawk of laughter, and Henri's face darkened. He picked up a spoon and began stirring the heaped butts in the ashtray. "Did you ever wonder, Roger, old boy," he said in a causal, intimate tone, 'why our Sarah is such a mixture of races, why she had pale skin but hair that's as kinky as that of a Haitian? Well, I'll tell you. Her mother was an Irishwoman, and he father was a monkey.[355]

Here, Lee uses hair as a signifier for racialized otherness. Sarah's "kinky" hair marks her as African American, as an African "savage" or "monkey" (in Henri's jargon[356]) and signifies her racial differences from her white male comrades. Sarah arrives in France to flee her parents' influence. In fact, Henri (mis)reads Sarah's hair, demarcating and controlling her body with his insults, in an effort to show her who he thinks she is (exotic/savage) and who has the power in their relationship and in the world. When Henri grabs Sarah's hair and announces that he wants to tell Roger about her "elegant pedigree," his action produces echoes of the traumatic slave auction block.[357] In that

moment Henri marks Sarah's body (skin and hair) with racist and sexist discourse when he points to her mixed race heritage by cruelly linking her "Black" father with her presumed "white" mother. Even though Henri and Sarah are sexually intimate, he wants her to perform as an inferior individual and he uses her "nappy" hair as a means to reinforce the hegemonic discourse of a racialized, class, and gendered social order. Sarah notes that she is not offended by Henri's racist comments, having previously encouraged him to tell her "nigger jokes."[358] Her desire for ribald and racist jokes from her white lover Henri demonstrates her refusal to perform as one might expect an African American woman to perform. That is to say, since she does not become outraged by the jokes, but, on the contrary, requests them, she is underscoring the dynamic and performative nature of identity by not responding in a manner others deem appropriate.[359] Here, Sarah demonstrates how racialized and gendered identities are not static, but are in fact, fluid, by not performing as some other essentialist African Americans think she should perform. Also, Sarah's response to Henri's behavior recalls DuBois' reflection on the duality that African Americans experience straddling the white world and the African American world, "a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence."[360] Sarah's self confidence is shaky, as is her performance as an African American woman, as evidenced by her intimate relationship with a lover that recites racist jokes.[361]

Sarah later throws off her performance of faux white girl[362] and returns to her cultural roots in America in full knowledge of how others have looked at her hair and skin and decided to treat her as a subhuman. She does not contradict Henri's comments because, over time, she has internalized the negative observations about her African

American female body and hair.[363] Lee's text is similar to Harlem Renaissance novelist Jesse Fauset's,[364] in that both explore the lives of upper-middle class African Americans who h use hair to perform the complexities and contradictions of their identities as well as to make meaning of their bodies, lives, and the world.

And this phenomoman is not exclusive to fiction, as it is also the subject in non-fiction. Aliona L. Gibson's memoir Nappy: Growing Black and Female in America examines hair as a trope for conformity and non-conformity and African American female solidarity. Before Gibson offers her own experiences of hair as a signifier for conformity and non-conformity, she presents Dorothy Reed, an African American Bay area television personality who wore braids on television appearances in 1981. She was promptly suspended and eventually took a job as a radio personality.[365] Reed's decision to flount her non-conformity to the beauty standards established by whites with a hairstyle reflecting an aspect of her own heritage resulted in a penalty.

Like Reed, Gibson wanted to try something new with her hair but continued to refuse to chemically straighten her hair. However, when Gibson began searching for a new job she was too concerned about her natural hairstyle.[366] She learned of a job at an art institution and decided to apply. She was encouraged by a peer to have her hair straightened rather than wearing her hair in her natural unprocessed style.[367] Gibson was torn. On the one hand, she did not want to alter her hair and bear the price[368] and physical pain--straightening combs are placed in an open fire to be heated and then pulled through the virgin hair and made straight. On the other hand, while Gibson liked her hair in its natural state, she was interested in finding a new position and was willing to try anything to give her an edge. In fact, a peer advised that Gibson could change her hair back to her

old style once she'd gotten the job. Unfortunately, Gibson, with her straight hair did not get the job.[369] This example demonstrates the complexity of trying to conform to society's preconceived notions of beauty, femininity, and acceptability and how sometimes even straight hair on a dark skinned woman is not enough. This hair incident illuminates R. D. Laing's[370] premise that false self:

> ...consists in becoming what the other person wants or expects one to become one's "self" in imagination or in games in front of a mirror. In conformity, therefore, with what one perceives or fancies to be the Thing one is in the other person's eyes, the false self becomes that thing.[371]

Gibson's hair straightening incident causes her identity to be informed by a self-consciousness that leads her to alter not merely the texture of her hair but also her identity and aesthetic politics. Her contradictory hairstyle performance reveals a contradictory consciousness[372] i.e., Gibson's critical assessment of the white normative female beauty standard as a mode of power and control while simultaneously consenting to use this mode. Ultimately this hair trope of conformity serves briefly to undermine Gibson's quest for liberation---liberation against the racist and sexist which has contributed to many African American women feeling inadequate about their bodies and how they operate in the world. Gibson's disclosure of her conflicting hair experiences serve as the impetus for performing African American aesthetics and identities, no matter how ambivalent, to assist in her liberation and perhaps that of her readers.

Gibson also examines how hair among African American women is a trope for female fellowship. Gibson peppers her narrative with the experiences of multi generational African American women who have bonded over their hair experiences and have come to understand that their hair, like the rest of their dark bodies, is beautiful even if the images in the dominant culture do not reinforce this notion.[373] Most notably Gibson

shares how Elaine, who wears braids, has encouraged her to learn to love her body and hair; in essence to "love Blackness."

Cultural critic bell hooks argues for performance of loving blackness as a mode of resistance:

> Collectively, black people and our allies in struggle are empowered when we practice self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines the practices of domination. Loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim black life....[Africans must] break through the walls of denial which hide the depth of black self-hatred, inner anguish, and unreconciled pain"[374]

The core of hooks' argument that African Americans must learn to decolonize their minds; i.e., to love their black selves and not to think or perform as if they are inferior to anyone. Gibson's friend teaches her that there is no need to remain locked in the status quo by perming her hair. Gibson, having learned to love blackness, begins wearing her hair natural after being liberated from the internal and external pressures to perm or add extensions. Elaine and the other African American women in Gibson's life teach her how to develop new positive ways of embracing her black body and nappy hair. When Gibson begins to (re)construct a new identity via her natural hair she becomes more confident in her beauty, continues her education, travels and learns about other Black people in the world. This helps Gibson gain a sense of self love for her nappy hair and black body and an understanding of the politics of networking, developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships with men all of which encourages her to do development work in South Africa.[375]

Like Gibson, Judy Scales-Trent explores the relationship between her hair and her own identity performance in her 1995 autobiography Notes of a White Black Woman.

However, Scales-Trent's appearance and experiences provides her with a notably different set of challenges:

> Like my parents, I am a black American with white skin, and African American with both African and European ancestors... If you are black and white at the same time, once you finally realize that it is not you that is strange, you realize that something very strange is going on in society.[376]

This strangeness is illuminated by Scales-Trent when she interprets hair as a trope for self definition and racial shame. In the chapter "Africa in My Hair" Scales-Trent relays the uncertainty she feels about her hair. As a child, Scales-Trent is vexed by her "European" skin and her coarse African hair, which is so "wild" that her mother used hot combs, curling irons, and braids (among other methods) to style it. Scales-Trent wants to perform as a white person, despite being African American, and her coarse hair makes her performance less authentic. The coarse hair marks her as African American, and as such "uncherished and un-beautiful."[377] Later, when Scales-Trent is preparing to enter college, chemical hair straighteners helps her finally achieve the look she's yearned for from childhood: beautiful and white.[378] Scales-Trent's yearning is echoed by Maya Angelou, who shares a similar incident in her autobiography I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings:

> Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of this kinky mass that momma wouldn't let me straighten? [379]

The examples of Angelou and Scales-Trent's yearning for whiteness further illustrates how African American women struggle to form positive self-definitions in the face of denigrated images of Black womanhood.[380] Moreover, their yearning highlights the

"madness" of internalized gendered racism and how because of this "madness" some African American women readily participate in their own victimization.[381]

After college, Scales-Trent begins to embrace her African American roots and stops straightening her hair. She is influenced in part by followers of and contributors to the Black Power movement, who were very outspoken about the dangers of internalized racism.[382] One such contributor was poet and scholar Haki Madhubuti (nee Don Lee), who does exactly that in his poem "The Primitive:"

whites
christianized us.
raped our minds with:
T.V. & straight hair
Reader's Digest & bleaching creams,
tarzan & jungle jim,
european history & promises.
Those alien concepts
of whi-teness[383]

Madhubuti's poem is direct in its attack on whiteness as a normative standard and as such it can be understood as indicating the need for African Americans to discard whiteness as the standard for hair, identity politics, or anything else in the African American community.[384] Scales-Trent's rejection of whiteness as a normative standard and decision to wear her hair in its "natural" state is felt by her and other African Americans as stylish. As Scales-Trent notes, however,

> But that time was short-lived. For now, as I get older, my hair gets thinner and straighter. It is also turning gray. Oddly enough, the gray is not so problematic ... this was an expected loss. It is the second loss, the unexpected loss, that is so deeply felt: I am losing the mark of my African heritage. For although I wear Europe on my face, I wear Africa in my hair.[385]

Scales-Trent's wants a static African American identity, but identity performances are dynamic. Reginald McKnight expresses this contention convincingly in Confessions of a Wanna be Negro:

> Is blackness-as-performance somehow regarded as a free-floating entity, belonging to no one in particular, while whiteness-as-performance can, and should, only belong to whites? After all, it appears to me that black-influenced whites are very often thought to be deepened and ennobled by such processes, while white-influeneed blacks are regarded as weakened, diluted, less black.[386]

For Seales-Trent, hair becomes a trope for self-definition as she reealls inquiries from several white women about the texture of her hair:

> Three times that week (three times!), different white women had stopped me on the street to tell me how nice my hair looked and to ask where I had gotten my "perm". These were, of course, words that were meant kindly. And there's nothing wrong with asking for advice. But the white women were also saying that they understood me to be a white woman just like them who had gone to a beauty parlor to have this beautiful African texture put into my straight hair. The first two times, I was polite to these absolute strangers. I thanked them, told them the 'eurl' was natural. But by the third time, I had had it with not so quite-true politeness, and the truth just pushed its way out: "This is not a permanent. This is just the way my hair is. And you ean't get it from a beauty parlor. You have to be born colored and wait forty years for nappy hair to come into style."[387]

Scales-Trent's hair and other physical features are not read as Afriean Ameriean by the white women, and their (mis)reading of her hair disrupts her desire to perform as an African American woman. Her "nappy" hair is seen as the result of a permanent because her white skin works as a camouflage, eausing her identity performanee as an African American woman to be read as fraudulent or misread by whites and Afriean Americans alike.[388] This ineident illustrates the dilemma of Scales-Trent's identity performance, where something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.[389] Scales-Trent's struggle reveals an urgent need to rebuke an

identity that others ascribe to her body due to the (mis)reading of her race in a world still trying to understand the problem of the color line. Her reactions also illustrate the notion that some African Americans can exhibit traits of "Blackness" but "perform it rather poorly."[390] Her narrative sees this passive form of passing in two ways. First, the passing confounds her ability to identify herself by embracing her racial heritage even when she encounters a stranger. Second, the passing allows for yet another opportunity to challenge and refuse to conform to America's arbitrary racial categories as she performs her identity.[391] Scales-Trent's life writings highlight the problematic nature of taxonomic restrictions of race and how African Americanness and whiteness fail to provide the grounds for a stable, coherent identity.[392] The "failure" of her performance illuminates both the performance aspect of identity and the subjective and arbitrary nature of racial categories. Scales-Trent's rather dramatic reaction also highlights how performance always provokes affects reality as well as theatrical (staged) effects, not only in the sense of simulation and duplication of reality, but also in the sense of its real production of meaning, kinds of awareness, events, and lived experiences. [393] Indeed, as Scales-Trent (re)constructs and describes her identity, she broadens the understanding of race to whites among others. Perhaps the women she encountered will be more cautious in their (mis)reading of racial performances and will interrogate whiteness as a cultural standard.

Even in traditional religions, hair has been explored as a normative of beauty (white hair, that is) by which African American hair has been compared. Sonsyrea Tate also interrogates whiteness as a standard among women and young girls in the Nation of Islam (NOI) in her 1997 autobiography Little X. Tate describes the process of growing up from the perspective of a third-generation African American Muslim. One standout

issue Tate explores is hair and the headpieces that Muslim women have been encouraged to wear.[394] Elijah Muhammad (once the leader of the NOI) had decreed that Muslim women were forbidden to either imitate white female normative beauty standards or behave in an immodest manner.[395] He also publicly renounced Muslim women who had already altered their hair with heat or chemicals, marking this type of hair as a sign for self loathing. Muhammad expected African American NOI young girls and women to reject hair straightening and embrace their divine heritage by wearing their hair "natural."[396]

Tate and her sisters were raised to be "modest maidens" in accordance with NOI teachings. However, their efforts often produced unwanted results. For example, Tate's mother made her cover her body from head to toe as a way of dressing modestly and not drawing attention to herself.[397] Yet, the young Tate reasoned that her covering *did* draw other's attention to her.[398] Eventually, Tate's mother allowed her to remove the headpiece, revealing a head of hair that Aunt Nell (her mother's sister) had straightened.[399] The practice of hair straightening contradicted the NOI's agenda of the body and hair being sites of protest.[400] Tate's mother straightened her hair, and this contradicted the NOI's directive.[401] Indeed, when Tate's maternal grandmother (a non-Muslim) learned that her aunt was straightening Tate's hair, she snorts, "No sense in pressing that girl's hair. Soon as she gets home, she's gon' have to wrap it up in that Moozlem rag again."[402] Here, Tate's grandmother points out the hypocrisy of straightening the hair and then covering it with the hijab.[403] Also, throughout Tate's narrative she shows how her mother ceases to follow the NOI closely. Tate's mother's behavior appears hypocritical, but she might have ignored the rules because she realized

that Muslim girls were ostracized and this made adolescent years more challenging.[404] Furthermore, Tate's mother's refusal to follow the NOI's edict by straightening her daughter's hair demonstrates a tension between feminine ideals and racial solidarity. One the one hand, Tate wore the hijab to be outwardly modest. On the other hand, she wanted to mirror the hairstyles worn by her peers in school. Either way, Tate's hijab or straightened hair illuminate that identity performances are an ever changing process.[405]

Similarly, anthropologist Carolyn Moxley Rouse discusses hair in her research on the lives of African American women within the Islamic faith. However, unlike Tate, the women she interviewed do not straighten their hair. Some of the women who wear the hijah see it as representing the colonization of the Third World body.[406] Many of the African American women of Islam also see the *hijah* as a way for them to perform and (re)construct new identities rooted in a sense of self-love. One interview is particularly revealing:

> The Prophet Muhammad said that the only thing that should be showing on a woman is her hands, her face, and possibly her feet. It does mean you have the right to put some hair out and some hair in. We want to do that because we have bought into a system that says [straight] hair is beautiful. And for the African American woman we have bought into this system that makes us go buy perms, which are temporary. We go and fry it, dye it, lay it to the side, we put everything in it that we can so that we can be someone who we are not. Then Allah told us that we should put a scarf on. I was really grateful for the scarf. [407]

This passage clearly shows that some African American Muslim women wearing the *hijab* and covering their hair are developing a new African American Muslim female aesthetic.

Rouse's study underscores how central hair is to some African American women's religious identity performances. For some African American women, hair can

become the primary focus of their lived experience. Toni Morrison addresses this topic in her 1993 novel Jazz from the perspective of an older African American woman. Jazz is the story of a turbulent marriage between protagonists Violet and Joe. As the novel opens Violet, who has suffered a mental breakdown attends the funeral of Joe's teenage girlfriend, whom he has murdered, and tries to slash the face of Dorcas, the dead girl. After leaving the funeral the fifty year old Violet becomes obsessed with everything about Dorcas, especially her hair.[408] In this sad tale Morrison uses hair as a signifier for passing/race/beauty, economics, independence, beauty, and youth/age.[409] Morrison's use of African American hair as a trope for passing centers on Golden Gray, the taboo love child of Vera Louise Gray, a wealthy white woman, and Henry Lestory (or LesTroy), an enslaved African. Vera leaves her home and settles in Baltimore, Maryland where she hides the news of the child from the father and tells her new neighbors that Golden is an abandoned orphan she is raising with the help of her servant True Belle. Vera thinks the deception will go smoothly because Golden is fair skinned with "floppy yellow curls which covered his head and lobes of his ears." [410] Eventually, however, Vera becomes worried about Golden's performance as a white man:

> When the two of them, the white woman and the cook, bathed him they sometimes passed anxious looks at the palms of his hand, the texture of his drying hair. [411]

The women are anxious because they are worried that Golden's features will eventually reveal his true racial identity as an African American.[412]

True Belle uses hair as a trope for beauty as she tells her granddaughter Violet stories about Golden, who is situated as "the beautiful prince." Two of the things which make him beautiful are his light skin and blonde hair. Violet hears these tales and

understands that hair like Golden's is a sign for both beauty and internalized racism.[413] This notion is revisited when her husband has an illicit affair with Dorcas, an 18 year old light skinned girl with hair that did not need straightening.[414] It is the absence of hair like Golden's and Dorcas,' the debt collectors taking their family's beautiful things from their home, the loss of her parents, and her inability to become a mother that all contribute to her failure to see herself as a beautiful African American woman. These factors in Violet's life cause her to have a mental breakdown, as is evidenced in her knife attack on her husband's dead mistress at the beginning of the novel. When Violet confesses to Dorcas's aunt, Alice Manfred that: "I wasn't born with a knife," she supports the contention that she is not mentally stable.[415]

Violet and Alice seem to understand that the knife was necessary in the battle that African American women, like herself and Violet, had to wage in order to combat racism and sexism when Alice says:

> Black women were armed; black women were dangerous and the less money they had the deadlier the weapon they chose. Who were the unarmed ones?...What the world had done to them it was now doing to itself. Did the world mess over them?[416]

Here, Alice Manfred seems to suggest that racism and sexism are at the root of some African American women's efforts to combat internalized gendered racism.

Jazz differs from Morrison's other works (e.g. The Bluest Eye and Song of Solomon) in that light skin and wavy long hair were not necessarily made signifiers of beauty for the characters. For instance, when Vera Louise educates Golden about life she tells him that hair that is thought to be pretty can not be too long.[417] Second, in considering Dorcas's beauty Morrison tweaks the currency of fair skin beauty within the African American community:

> Dorcas should have been prettier than she was. She just missed. She had all the ingredients of pretty too. Long hair, wavy, half good, half bad. Light skinned. Never used skin bleach. Nice shape. But it missed somehow. If you looked at each thing, you would admire that thing---the hair, the color, the shape. All together it didn't fit. [418]

Here, the speaker (Dorcas' friend Felise) implies that an African American woman without light skin and long straight hair should not feel as though she can not perform as a beautiful individual. Through Felise, Morrison is mocking the assumptions of some African Americans that light skin and long wavy hair are the only features that can be construed as being beautiful. Morrison is chastising African Americans for investing in whiteness as a normative standard instead of looking to the variety of their dark skin and nappy short hair as the standard of beauty for African American women. Morrison suggests that African Americans have been conditioned to think they are deformed and disfigured.[419] Such beliefs as these cause some African American women (e.g., Violet) to have mental breakdowns. Morrison encourages the reader to reject these notion beliefs entirely.

Violet's mental breakdown illustrates how hair also serves as a trope for cultural memory. According to Jan Assman and John Czaplicka, cultural memory "preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its identity, history, unity, and peculiarity."[420] The stories about Golden that True Belle tells Violet as a child forms one cornerstone of Violet's cultural memory and reflect for her a beauty that she, a woman whose skin is the color of soot, is unable to achieve.[421] As a result, she does not view herself as beautiful. For Violet, hair produces a cultural memory of self-loathing and bodies in pain. The painful memories from Violet's childhood determine who she is, how she reacts in the world, and how she performs her

identity. Indeed, her cultural and political memories are established early in life and learned unconsciously. Thus, Violet's early memories lead to her self-loathing and negatively affect the identity she performs as an adult.[422]

Finally, Dorcas' entire being (i.e., her youth, light skin, and "good" hair) is a signifier for the uncanny; i.e., that which is familiar and already established in one's mind and has been repressed.[423] In this sense, Dorcas' light skin and hair recall the uncanny image of Golden and the associated feeling of abandonment that her mother's suicide leaves her with. Dorcas' youth, beautiful skin, and long wavy hair embody all that could lure Violet's husband away to have sexual intercourse, and conceive the babies that Violet has been unable to provide. As much as all of this troubled Violet, she is also drawn to Dorcas's hair.[424] Repression of her feeling of abandoned causes her to perform as an insane person.

Morrison also uses hair as a trope for economic independence for Violet, who works as an unlicensed hairdresser[425] out of her home to help supplement the money her husband Joe (a beauty product salesman) gives her. Violet's craft as hairstylist also allows her to work in a space and at a pace that is of her own choosing.

Finally, Morrison uses hair as a signifier for youth and sexuality. Distraught over her husband's infidelity with the younger Dorcas, Violet begins trying to find out what Dorcas is like. Violet becomes so obsessed with Dorcas that she mimics her dancing, asks what type of makeup she likes to wear, and finds the type of marcelling iron Dorcas uses to style her hair.[426] It seems that Violet wants to mimic Dorcas' performance to recapture her husband's sexual and emotional attention. At the close of the novel Violet and Joe attempt to rebuild their marriage by reestablishing intimacy. For his part, Violet's

husband Joe publicly touches his wife and takes her out on dates and this produces[427] a hopeful ending to a marriage that had had a turbulent start, and the hope that Joe's attention to Violet can help her develop an aesthetic and identity free from her family's legacy of self loathing and insanity. Yet, more importantly Violet is an example of Morrison's claim that the quest for beauty as part of one's identity does more harm than good because the standards for some African[428] American women is not one of their choosing. Also, by the novel's end, Violet represents Morrison's hope that while African Americans understand problems of the politics of hair and color will be careful not to reduce complex human beings to objects.[429]

In her 1998 debut novel Caucasia, Danzy Senna is also careful not to reduce human beings to objects. In fact, Senna uses hair to illuminate the complexities of Birdie's attempts at constructing and performing her identities. Birdi, Senna's mixed race heroine, is the younger of two daughters of Deck Lee (an African American professor) and Sandy Lee (a white woman). Sandy becomes involved in the work of African American political activists that the federal government is trying to arrest and/or exterminate. Deck and Sandy part ways and become fugitives. Each takes the child that most resembles them; the older daughter Cole accompanies her father, and Birdie travels with her mother. What follows is Senna's effort to show the ambiguity and fluidity of racial classifications and identity performances.

Birdie manages to float between both African American and white identities, allowing both her body and (in some cases) other people to tell her who she is.[430] As a child, Birdie sees her sister Cole's cinnamon-skin and curly-hair as signifiers of her racial identity. Birdie identified with Cole as a reflection that "proved" Birdie's "existence" and

instructed her as to how to perform. Her African American performance is questioned by two African American students when she and Cole start attending classes together at The Nkrumah School. One of the students directly asks Birdie, "What you doin' in this school? You white?"[431] The students criticize Birdie's identity performance mercilessly. At the end of her first day of classes, she joins the other students in their daily proclamation, 'Black is Beautiful':

> When it was my turn, I stood. My fingers clenched the cloth of my skirt, and my voice quavered: "Black is beautiful?" It had come out more like a question. I heard one boy—the same one who had thrown the spitball at me—say into his cupped hands, "Guess you must be ugly/" Snickers filled the room. "Damn, he called her shit." "Ali, you so goofy." "Ali, I heard your mama----" Mrs. Potter hit her desk with a ruler, and the class went silent. "That's' enough. Birdie, you can sit down."[432]

Birdie's classmates look at her white skin and straight hair and read them as obvious signs of whiteness.

Birdie is later forced to perform as a white Jewish girl named Jess when she and her mother are hiding out from COINTELPRO in New Hampshire. Birdie's racial performance is then again questioned when she has a telling exchange with another African American girl named Samantha outside a predominately white party:

> She said, "Well you want to start back?" We walked, our feet crunching in unison as we made our way toward the loud burst of adolescent fever and debauchery. It had begun to drizzle softly, like a veil brushing my skin. I could hear the moisture touching the leaves of the forest; it made a mild hissing sound. Samantha held her hands over her hair so that it wouldn't get wet. Just as we reached the lawn before the house, I pulled her to as stop and said, 'one more question." She looked impatient now. She didn't want to be popular this badly. "What?" There was a prolonged silence, then she smiled sideways the way she had in the woods. She said softly that I wasn't sure I'd heard her right" "I'm black. Like you."[433]

Samantha has observed Birdie's/Jesse's performance as a Jewish girl and noticed that it does not mirror the performance of her Jewish best friend Nora. Also, unlike others who

see only Birdie's/Jesse's white skin and hair. Samantha has looked deeper and has observed something in Birdie/Jesse suggesting an African American "essence." These observations prevent Samantha from believing Birdie's/Jesse's performance as Jewish.[434]

The incident with Samantha illustrates that Birdie's body might signify whiteness to some and African Americanness to others.[435] I suggest that Birdie's performance (which is dynamic and performative) is complicated by her identity as a mixed race individual. In the novel, Birdie has to perform as an African American, a white girl, and later as a Jewish girl. She shifts between racial and ethnic identities rendering performances appropriate for the situation and individuals. At the same time, Birdie's skin and hair (like those of some other mixed-race individuals) contribute to the misreading of her identity performances. These misreadings reflect her society's binary identity system which forces individuals to choose to perform either as an African American or white. Birdie's performances are further mediated by her interactions with others. Whites interacting with Birdie read her identity performances as white. However, African Americans interacting with Birdie (particularly her classmate Samantha) do not all read her performance as white. Ultimately, Birdie's abdication of part of her racial identity leads to a performance that is fraught with restrictions and with disapproval from others.

For Birdie, her yearning is to have her identity performance read as primarily African American. Yet, it is Birdie's identity performance as an African American that is her most problematic performance (largely due to her to desire to perform this identity the most). As a small child Birdie relies on images of her white mother and (apparently) African American sister during her Lacanian imaginary phase to help her develop her

image of self. I suggest that Birdie becomes confused as she tries to emulate these two women. She becomes more confused as she gets older and enters the symbolic phase where she tries to constrain her identity performances within the laws and restrictions established by society. As a result, her performances are not always convincing. While Birdie loves her mother, and acknowledges her by identifying herself as "mixed," what she seems to want most of all is to be with her family and be liked, loved, and claimed the way her somewhat darker sister Cole as well as other African Americans.

I maintain that when Birdie identifies herself at the end of the novel, she lists her identity as "Black" and then mentions that she is mixed.[436] It is the ordering that matters, she wants to be seen first as "Black" and not because of society's old one drop rule, but because she simply wants to be seen that way. Yet, it is her skin color and hair that prevents her from giving a performance that is read as "authentic" by her African American family and other African Americans. In this sense, Birdie is an excellent example of Naomi Zack's postulation that mixed race individuals should be granted the freedom to choose how they choose and perform their identities.[437]

Like Senna's fictional heroine, Birdie, Rebecca Walker is a mixed race woman for whom the issue of hair also impacts her identity performances. Walker, the daughter of acclaimed African American author Alice Walker and Jewish lawyer Mel Leventhal, also discusses the difficulties of navigating both African American and Jewish worlds in her 2001 autobiography Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of Shifting Self. However, unlike Birdie, Walker has an African American mother and some other African American relatives to identify with during her "imaginary phase." I maintain that when Walker's parents divorced and she divides her time between their two homes, she has

difficulty with identity performance because her mother largely leaves her alone to complete her writing. Thus, Walker is left to identify with her white Jewish father and white Jewish stepmother, who contribute to her desire to identify and perform as a white girl. For example, when Walker is in the third grade and living at her father's house she develops a crush on a white boy who tells Walker that he does not like black girls. Walker muses:

> Bryan Katon, the boy I like, tells me that he doesn't like black girls, and I think, with this big whoosh that turns my stomach upside down and almost knocks me over, is that what I am, a black girl? And, that's when all the trouble starts, because suddenly I don't know what I am and I don't know how to be not what he thinks I am. I don't know how to be a not black girl.[438]

Walker continues,

> My stepmother is a not black girl. When she picks me up on Fridays after school in her tall, brown suede boots for the weekend, I wait inside school a little longer, until I am sure Bryan is outside and will see me go over to her and be hugged by her. I want him to see her take my backpack from me and take my hand, and I want him to see me get into her car. And when my grandma Miriam comes to pick me up on other days I do the same thing. I make a big fuss in front of school so that he will see that I am related to not black girls. I start to brush my hair straight, a hundred times every night before I go to sleep, like I see Jan Brady do on The Brady Bunch. Jan Brady is a not black girl. I roll my hair in pink rollers when I am at my grandma's house so that I will have bangs, so that my hair will look more like the not black girls at my school. And I tell my stepmother that I want the doll that she says I should want, because all girls want dolls, and even though I have not ever had a baby doll am I am not interested in a plastic baby that eats colored mush and then poops it out, I think, this must be part of being a not black girl.[439]

As Walker begins to understand society's racial classifications of mixed race individuals that "look" black, she becomes unhappy with her racial status, and begins using her familial association and white bodies of her stepmother and grandmother to help her perform as a white girl. Also, if she is to be liked by Bryan, she must try to alter her

performance and embrace white dolls, and thereby produce a white identity that is pleasing to him. Walker feels pressured to avoid identifying with her African American mother and to adopt a performance resembling those of her stepmother and other white kin. She understands that to many of the white people in her life, her mother does not have any currency. Walker begins using her hair as an aspect of her identity performance and copying white cultural practices of Jan Brady and white girls in her class in the hope that her racial performance would now be read as white. Walker also deliberately fails to invite her mother to her school play because she believes that her mother's identity performance as an African American woman will disrupt her own desired identity performance as a white girl. Walker's refusal to invite her mother produces guilt and shame that "sticks to her like sweat."[440] However, Walker's performance of a white girl is not accepted because of her dark skin and hair that is not straight like her stepmother's, grandma Miriam, Jan Brady, the white doll, or her white female classmates.

Walker's confusion with identity performance continues when she moves to California with her mother and lives and attends school with African Americans. She yearns to identify with them and perform racial identities that reflect theirs. One incident in the book exemplifies the role of hair and how Walker learned to perform her identity as African American. Walker is hanging out with Colleen, an African American girl whose identity performance she envies. In describing Colleen, Walker says, "She's a real black girl, and I'm not."[441] Colleen has nappy hair which, in Walker's eyes, appears to be a signifier for the embodied experience of "real" African American girls. The girls are in Colleen's house when Colleen tells her sister Aisha to get a comb. Walker watches, secretly wishing that Colleen would ask to comb her hair in the same way:

> I want her to say the same thing to me. I want Colleen to say, "Go get a comb and bring it to me so that I can do your hair." I want to be on the floor like that, like Aisha eventually is, between Colleen's legs, in the warm there, knowing my place, knowing what to do."[442]

Here, Walker does not yearn for her mixed race identity; rather, what she yearns for is acceptance into these African American girls's community. Also, Walker uses hair as a signifier for both race and belonging. Walker's participation would keep her from feeling fragmented and link her to the African American community. The practice of combing her hair signifies race, bonding, and attempts to reinforce African American heteronormative femininity. Walker later shifts from this thinking when she reveals that she is a lesbian and has shaved off her hair.[443] Walker's life narrative leaves the readers with the understanding that she is in a state of cultural liminality.

Concerns about cultural liminality are also taken up in Emily Raboteau's 2006 semi-autobiographical novel The Professor's Daughter. Raboteau's biracial heroine Emma (and her late brother Bernie) are confronted with the issues of what it means to (re)construct and perform one's identity in America:

> ....we didn't look black, although Bernie came closer: fuller lips, darker skin, flatter nose.....I remain a question mark. When people ask me what I am, which is not an everyday question, but one I get asked every day, I want to tell them about Bernie. I don't, of course. I just tell them what color my parents are, which is to say, my father is black and my mother is white. People don't usually believe me. You look_____(fill in the blank) Puerto Rican, Algerian, Israeli, Italian, Suntanned or maybe Like you Got Some Indian Blood, but you don't look like you got any Black in you. No way! Your father must be real light-skinned. In fact, he isn't, but somehow in the pooling pudding of genes our mom's side won out in the category of hair. And this is really what makes you black in the eyes of others.

Here Emma asserts that hair is a signifier for race that causes others to (mis)read her performance as an African American woman. Raboteau uses hair as a sign for race again when Emma and her mother are shopping for a doll during Christmas:

> That winter was the season of the Stork Baby. My mother, being somewhat frantic and behind in her Christmas shopping, brought me with her to the Toys "R" Us to pick out a Stork Baby doll, but the shelves were bare. We stood on the customer service line for over an hour. "It's a two-week wait for a Stork Baby," said the clerk. My mom was astonished. "Two weeks?" "That's right, lady. Unless you want a black doll. We have some in storage. You can have a black doll today." "Do you want a black doll? My mom asked. "I don't know, I said. It didn't seem like they were very good. "We'll take one of each," my mother decided. She signed our name to the white-baby waitlist. We walked out with the black baby that day. I had two dolls, but I learned to hate them both. They were pug-faced and ugly. I cut off their yarn hair, and spoiled their hair faces with purple markers. I was disturbed.[444]

Like Claudia in Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Emma destroys her dolls. In this instance Emma is deconstructing whiteness and the value it assigns to African Americans and women as problematic objects. Emma is left with the understanding that there is less desire for the African American doll, despite the fact that her mother purchases dolls of both races. This incident highlights the somewhat subtle ways African Americans learn to internalize negative perceptions about themselves and learn to embrace the dominant culture's beauty standards. The incident also echoes the research of Mamie and Kenneth Clark on the role dolls assumed in demonstrating children's sensibilities about race.[445] I argue that Emma gets the message that there is a sense of inferiority, lack of beauty, and desirability if one is an African American. Moreover, this incident "reveals the damaging effect of a doll that establishes such an impossible standard of physical perfection for little girls."[446]

Raboteau again uses hair as a sign for racial ambiguity through her character Willa Two, a young girl born to her white mother Willa and a Black father whose identity is not known. Willa Two's mother goes insane and eventually dies after giving birth to Willa Two in a mental hospital. Willa Two is sent to the home of a white couple who agrees to be the child's foster parents. One day, the white foster mother notices that Willa Two's fine silky hair had begun to nap. Upon seeing the marker of racial difference, the white foster mother realizes that Willa Two is black and returns her to the mental hospital.[447] Willa Two is later placed in a bordello.

Raboteau also uses Willa Two's hair as a trope for racial stereotyping. Black Sally, Willa Two's caretaker at the bordello, styles Willa Two's hair into Bantu knots, each of which was tied with a pastel colored ribbon.[448] Willa Two's new image functions as an intertextual reference to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Topsy, the racially stereotypical child of Uncle Tom's Cabin.[449] Willa Two and Topsy are similar in that they are motherless and that their features and hair function as visual tropes of women presumed to be devoid of individuality, value, and beauty. Like Topsy, Willa Two just "grows,"[450] first in her mother's womb, then in a white foster home, then in a brothel, and ultimately in an orphanage that does nothing to help her perform an identity that celebrates or even acknowledges her humanity:

> Willa spent long periods indoors staring at her black face in the mirror, trying to trace the origins of her features. She started to hate her hair, eyes, and her lips. She saw herself ugly, homeless, strange. She didn't know she was more South African than South Africa. She only knew that she didn't belong. At night she watched her reflection contorted by raindrops in the windowpane and the gaping stretch of blackness behind it. Through this window, from time to time, came the long low howl of a train. Under the train, the wet ground moaned. Bones rotted. Diamonds gleamed.[451]

Willa Two's mirror experience recalls Lacan's concept of the mirror stage and demonstrates the core of the self.[452] In the mirror, Willa Two's reflected core is an image of self-loathing and isolation. Willa Two sees her hair and features as signs of not belonging. Her experiences invert those of Rebecca Walker, whose early childhood hair experiences served as a trope for belonging.

Unlike Walker and Raboteau, noted journalist and author Marita Golden critiques the notion of cultural liminality in identity performance through hair in her 2004 memoir Don't Play in the Sun. Golden discusses color and hair consciousness as seen in the United States and the rest of the world. One of her discussions focuses on the growing trend among African American women to color their hair blonde. Golden's specific focus is tennis superstar Serena Williams' alternatively blond braided or unbraided long straight hair.[453]

After viewing an image of Serena (featuring her long straight blond hair) that troubles Golden, she discusses the significance of Serena's long straight blond locks with her husband. He suggests that blond hair is just a fashionable color for young African Americans.[454] When Golden reads in the October 2002 issue of Ebony magazine[455] that Serena wants to be an actress, she subsequently interprets Serena's blond hair as her way of presenting her body to film producers and directors as a feminine, sexual commodity.[456] Golden also considers other blond African American entertainers (e.g., Mary J. Blige, Paula Jai Parker, and Lil Kim) and their use of blond hair as a sign for (re)constructed African American female sexual agency. That is to say, African American women are in charge of reconfiguring how they (re)present themselves in the

world and how they use their bodies to perform their identities. It is my contention that by embracing and coveting long straight blond hair, these African American women are imitating the naturally blond hair of children born through forced miscegenation.[457] W.E.B. DuBois writes of this point in "Of the Passing of the First-Born" in describing his son's physical appearance and dubious genealogy in the Souls of Black Folk:

> How beautiful he was, with his olive-tinted flesh and dark gold ringlets, his eyes of mingled blue and brown, his perfect little limbs, and the soft voluptuous roll which the blood of Africa had moulded into his features! I held him in my arms, after we had sped far away to our Southern home,---held him, and glanced at the hot red soil of Georgia and the breathless city of a hundred hills, and felt a vague unrest. Why was his hair tinted with gold? An evil omen was golden hair in my life. Why not had the brown of his eyes brushed out and killed the blue?—for brown were his father's eyes, and his father's father's.[458]

This passage demonstrates DuBois' understanding of the long history of the sexual exploitation of African American women at the hands of white men, and how the traces of that exploitation in curly blond hair and blue eyes causes some African Americans to be repulsed by these traits. bell hooks' observations about rapper Lil Kim's blond hair echo DuBois' concerns when she opines that Lil Kim has been "mutilated by white supremacist aesthetics."[459] Similarly, journalist Ann Powers states that Lil Kim's identity is a "mixed up cynical vision of female empowerment, but Lil' Kim clearly believes in it."[460] These criticisms aside, these images of African American women with blond hair (re)construct notions of identity, sexuality, and freedom which work in concert to produce more complex representations of African American women that are under their control.[461] Golden is skeptical about this notion. Her skepticism lies in not believing that hypersexuality and embracing aspects of whiteness as a normative standard of beauty help African American women to challenge negative notions about them. In fact, Golden

believes that they are simply replacing one negative stereotype with another negative stereotype.[462]

Golden's rejection of blond hair as "just color" rebukes the view that blond hair is a trope for subjugation for African American women. I agree with Golden's assertion, that their choice to wear blond hair at its core disputes essentialist notion of race and gender identities, and demonstrates that in this way African American authenticity is sanctioned through performance.[463] Golden believes that there is more than one way to perform as an African American woman. However, she also contends that there is value in essentialism, specifically a temporary "strategic essentialism"[464] that helps African American and African women to challenge the historical authority of the signifiers (white skin and long Blonde hair) of a white female aesthetic. If the African American and African female body is to be truly emancipated, then embracing some form of essentialism will be a necessary political tool. Moreover, in order to transform the way African American women use their bodies to perform in the world and alter the way they are seen and understood in the world, they must be prepared to think about hair in a new way. Golden suggests that a new way of performing identity involves rejecting cultural practices[465] like bleaching the skin and hair to subvert their own natural beauty and reinforce whiteness as the standard. It appears that Golden is less concerned with essentialism as she is with the contradictory messages about hair and identity politics that these African American women convey with their blonde tresses. While Golden supports their decision to wear the blond hair, she finds the notion that they do so because they like the color or want to invert the meaning of blonde hair to be dubious. As an example, Golden recounts a Washington Post's article on Serena Williams'[466] press conference

supporting the Fresh Air Fund charity. There, Serena encountered two underprivileged African American young girls who seemed less enthralled by the tennis star than they were by her blonde hair. It was reported that the girls remarked several times, "Man, she has nice hair."[467] Golden does not understand how African American women can ignore the long history of a white beauty aesthetic that produced negative images of African American women and then knowingly embrace blond hair as part of their identity performance. For Golden, blond hair signifies oppression.

Golden also recalls seeing African women in Lagos, Nigeria who bleached their skin to make it lighter so that their body would be viewed as more desirable and marriageable.[468] These women are knowingly willing to risk skin cancer for an opportunity to perform a different identity.[469] What Golden's two observations illustrate is that light skin and long blond hair seem to have currency across the globe. Golden suggests that straight blond hair on African American women is a performance of mimicry producing a "double articulation" that simultaneously renounces and affirms the power of whiteness.[470] Golden wants African American women to enter the new century being fully conscious of the problem of the color line and the significance of their performances.

Cultural critic Kobena Mercer asserts that "hair functions as a key historical ethnic signifier."[471] Indeed, African American women from the colonial period have employed hair as a signifier and mode of performing their dynamic identities in their fictional and non-fictional life writings. In this sense, African American women used their writings to revolutionize the way they are seen and defined, and to offer a glimpse into African American women's realities. The hair tropes explored in African American

women's writings highlight the cultural and intersectional political anxieties that pertain to their hair and identity performances.

In the following chapters, I hope to examine how some African American women's cultural production in the realm of popular culture (i.e., advertisements, art, comics, music, plays, prose, and television) has been employed to critique how some African American women's hair and identity have been (mis)represented. I will also explore how many African American women use hair as a way to (re)conceptualize their identities in modern culture and liberate and (re)shape their consciousness[472] about their hair and identity politics.

NOTES

[262] Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) 170.

[263] See for example, Toni Morrison, What the Black Woman Thinks of Women's Lib," New York Times Magazine Aug. 1971:15.

[264] Morrison explores the complex and contradictory issue of beauty in this novel as well as in Song of Solomon and Tar Baby.

[265] Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye (New York: Penguin Books, 1970) 210.

[266] Benedict Anderson defines the concept of community as a nation that is socially constructed and ultimately imagined by the individuals who perceive themselves as part of that group in The Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991) 5-7.

[267] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage,"Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977) 3.

[268]Denise Heinze, The Dilemma of "Double Consciousness":Toni Morrrison's Novels (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993) 25.

[269] Morrison (1970) 73.

[270] Lacan 5.

[271] Morrison (1970) 22.

[272] Morrison (1970) 21.

[273] Morrison (1970) 22.

[274] Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.

[275] Rooks suggests that some African American females began to make this shift in the late 1960s to the 1970s. In fact, she offers her own personal narrative as making that shift in 1976. See Noliwe Rooks, Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996) 6.

[276] It is worth noting that Kristeva sees abjection as a state revolt (albeit negatively). My argument is informed by Kristeva and I use it here to explore some African American women's conformity in Morrison's The Bluest Eye.

[277] Morrison (1970) 118.

[278] Barbara Creed, Horror And The Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection (London: Routledge, 1993) 65.

[279] Morrison (1970) 123.

[280] Heinze 22-30.

[281] On the subject of beauty, Morrison claims it was a most dangerous endeavor for many African American women. Morrison, "What the Black Woman Thinks of Women's Lib." New York Times Magazine Aug. 1971:15

[282] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 191.

[283] Jacques Lacan, trans. Alan Sheridan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1978).

[284] Slavoj Zizek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) 6.

[285] William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, Black Rage (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000).

[286] This is an example of African American advertisements which featured African Americans and also linked their beauty to their African heritage. See, for example, Madam C. J Walker Hair Care Products, advertisement in the Crisis Mar.1919: 256.

[287] Claude Barnett's beauty company Kashmir helped alter African American beauty in advertising. However, Barnett's ads were rather disingenuous in that they were brown reflections of dominant images of beauty. Most notably, Barnett's pamphlet for Kashmir Chemical Company's Nile Queen campaign features two women who look like whites with softer features. See Kathy Peiss, Hope in a Jar: The making of American's Beauty Culture (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998) 111.

[288] Morrison (1970) 22-23.

[289] Inger-Anne Softing, "Carnival and Black American Music as Counterculture in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye." American Studies in Scandinavia 27.2 (1995): 81-102.

[290] Heinze 23.

[291] It is important to note that there is a moment where Pecola, via Claudia's recalling, looks at the dandelions and wonders why people call them weeds and states that they are pretty. In that moment Pecola connects the beauty of the dandelions with herself. However, after she is mistreated by Mrs. Yacobowski when she tries to purchase some candy she leaves the store and looks at the dandelions again and changes her mind and thinks they are ugly weeds. In this moment, Pecola projects the ugliness of the dandelions on her own body. Morrison 47-50.

[292] Morrison (1970) 122.

[293] Heinze 28.

[294] Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993) 15.

[295] Morrison (1970) 124.

[296] Morrison (1970) 126.

[297] Morrison (1970) 48.

[298] In terms of normative consumer standards, Mr. Yacobowski (like most actual people) is not attractive. Here, Morrison implies that even "average" white people can not live up to such beauty standards.

[299] Morrison (1970) 45.

[300] Christian-Smith discusses how for some African American girls in novels reveal the "pain involved in accommodating someone else's definition [read whites] of self." See, for instance, Linda K. Christian-Smith, Becoming a Woman through Romance (New York: Routledge, 1990) 53.

[301] Interestingly, some of the upper class whites hold Nehemiah in contempt, much to his chagrin. See Shirley Anne Williams, Dessa Rose (New York: William Morrow, 1986) 243-256.

[302] Williams 88.

[303] Williams 257.

[304] Noliwe Rooks and Bill Gaskins, "Wearing Your Race Wrong: Hair, Drama, and a Politics of Representation for African American women at Play on a Battlefield," Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women, eds. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 286.

[305] For activists like Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Dubois, Black Nationalism included several forms; here, I am employing the notion of cultural nationalism in which the African American body, identity, art, and literature are a means of seeing the beauty of being Black. See "Black Nationalism." Encyclopedia Britannica, March 17 2006, Encyclopedia Britannica Premium Service, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9015495>. Also, see for example, Dubey's assertion that Williams' Dessa Rose and Gloria Naylor's Mama Day are Black Nationalist texts which are refiguring not only Black history but also black nationalism from a feminine understanding. Madhu Dubey, Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[306] Ali M. Mazrui, "Political Man and the Heritage of Hair: Some African Perspectives," British Journal of Political Science 2 (1972):1-20.

[307] Williams 83-88.

[308] Rooks 5.

[309] Alice Walker, The Color Purple (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982) 7.

[310] Throughout this study I use the term transgressive to describe performances by African American women that consciously contravene gender, racial, and sexual boundaries that society has established. The foundation of my understanding of transgressive is based on Foucault's concept. See Michel Foucault, The Essential Foucault, eds. Paul Rainbow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press) 442-457.

[311] For a discussion of women's blues songs see, for example, Hazel Carby, "It Just Bees That Way Sometimes," Feminisms, eds. Robin R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 746-58.

[312] Walker 116.

[313] Walker 96.

[314] Walker 112.

[315] Walker 111.

[316] Walker 112.

[317] Walker 12.

[318] Walker 53.

[319] Walker 53.

[320] Walker 75.

[321] It is important to note that it is Shug takes Celie out of the abusive relationship with Mr.____. And, it is Shug who encourages and helps Celie start her business selling pants. Walker 254.

[322] Walker 78.

[323] Walker 112.

[324] bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 4.

[325] See, for instance, Melville J. Herskovitz for a more in-depth analysis of mysticism in The Myth of the Negro Past (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990)

[326] Gloria Naylor, Mama Day (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1988) 90.

[327] Naylor 241.

[328] Naylor 247.

[329] Naylor 246.

[330] Valerie Boyd, "The Ritual," African American Review 27.1 (1993): 43-45.

[331] In the ethnographic interviews I conducted at Northwestern University all of the women revealed that they experienced a daily but mostly weekend ritual of having their hair care for by their mother or a female sibling. Also, the hair rituals that many African American women have experienced have been discussed by some African American women scholars such as Judy Seales-Trent, Mary Helen Washington, Michele Wallace, Andrea B. Rushing, and bell hooks. For example, hooks argues that "hair pressing was a ritual of black women's culture." In fact, during that ritual she learned many lessons about life and bonded with the women in her family. See, bell hooks, "Straightening Our Hair," Z Magazine Summer.1988:14-18.

[332] Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001) 24.

[333] Mary Helen Washington states that the emergent woman is a woman aware of the political and psychological oppression in her life and works to produce new options for herself. Mary Helen Washington, "Teaching Black-Eyed Susans: An Approach to the Study of Black Women Writers," Black American Literature Forum 11.1 (1977):20-24.

[334] Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1977) 149.

[335] C. L Peterson, "Foreword: Eccentric Bodies," Recovering the Black Female Body: Self representations by African American women, eds. Michael Bennett and Vanessa. D. Dickerson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2001) xv.

[336] Many African American female characters in African American women's fictional writings focus on their hair, but Pilate is unusual in that she has rejected a

Western white female aesthetic and roots her identity in one that places emphases primarily on race.

[337] Yet, Pilate's physical peculiarities preclude any lasting romantic relationships.

[338] Mary Helen Washington, ed. Black Eyed Susan Midnight Birds: Stories by and about Black Women. (New York: Anchor, 1975) xv.

[339] Morrison (1977) 151.

[340] In the book of Genesis (chapters 16 and 21) Hagar is an Egyptian servant of Abraham's wife Sarah. Sarah mistreats her and Hagar feels abused and abandoned and flees to the desert but returns and submits to Sarah is rewarded by giving birth to Ishmael. See The New American Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1970) 15-21.

[341] Heidegger theorizes madness thusly:

> the madman. Does the word mean someone who is mentally ill? No. Madness [*Wahnsinn*] here does not mean a mind filled with senseless delusions. "Whan" belongs to the old high German *wana* and means: without. The madman's mind senses - senses in fact as no one else does. Even so, he does not have the senses of others. He is of another mind. "Sinnan" signifies originally: to travel, to strive for...., to drive in a direction; indogermanic root *sent* and *set* means way. The departed one is a man apart, a madman, because he is on the way in another way. From that other direction, his madness may be called "gentle," for his mind pursues a greater stillness.

Indeed, the nuanced element of madness, the 'great stillness" is an allegory for the quest for beauty, specifically some African American women's desire to replicate white female aesthetic. See Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 173.

[342] See, for instance, Foucault's discussion of madness and the scars that are "seen" on the individual and also his contention that "madness" is a social category not merely biological. Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965) 116.

[343] Morrison (1977) 134.

[344] Morrison (1977) 131.

[345] Morrison (1977) 49.

[346] Morrison (1977) 127.

[347] Morrison (1977) 127.

[348]For a discussion on the unruliness of Hagar's hair as well as how Morrison employs and criticizes African American myths in her novels see, for example, Michael Awkward,"Unruly, and Let Loose: Myth, Ideology, and Gender in Song of Solomon," Calloloo 13.3 (1990): 484.

[349] Bertram D. Ashe, "Why don't he Like My Hair?": Constructing African-American Standards of Beauty in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes were Watching God" African American Review 29. 4 (1995):579-592.

[350] Morrison (1977) 315.

[351] Shane White and Graham White, Stylin': African American Expessive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[352] Morrison (1977) 334.

[353] Lawrence Hogue, "The Limits of Modernity: Andrea Lee's Sarah Phillips" The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States 19.4(1994):75-90.

[354] Andrea Lee, Sarah Philips (New York: Random House, 1984) 11.

[355] Lee 11.

[356] The "savage" reference here is similar to one Helga has with the white European in Nella Larsen's Quicksand.

[357] The auction block has also been described in slave narratives, for example Mary Prince, James Pennington, Olaudah Equiano, Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, or Solomon Northup all of whom offer vivid images of this dehumanizing experience. See Spenser Crew and Cynthia Goodman, ed. Unchained Memories: Readings From the Slave Narratives (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002) 21-23.

[358] Lee 12.

[359] Adrienne McCormick, "Is this Resistance? African-American Postmodernism in Sarah Philips," Callaloo 27.3 (2004):808-828.

[360] See for instance, W.E.B. DuBois, Souls of Black Folk (New York: Dover, 1994) 122. For additional discussion on American nervousness that is influenced by race, class, gender. See Tom Lutz, American Nervousness , 1903: An Anecdotal History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) Also, Sarah's non-response to the racist and sexist rhetoric hints at the possibility of some form of momentary madness (this notion is not about psychopathology) , such madness might give her an unusual type of freedom. Such freedom involves suffering and reveals "the freedom from all self-seeking pursuits" according to poet Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi. Thus, in this manner, Sarah does not have to pursue any race or gender consciousness retorts when she encounters such criticisms against her person. See Kabir Helminski, "I Will Make Myself Mad," Parabola (1998): 9-14. W. Lawrence Hogue 's asserts that Sarah's non response to Henri's racist and sexist comments is rooted in Sarah's identification with whites, since she has spent her youth and young adulthood in their elite educational institutions and social circles. Ultimately because of the alienation from African American culture (her parent class awareness of race oppression are too class and color conscious to be of healthy assistance) Sarah is unable to perform an identity that does not resembles her lived experiences. This illustrates her "genuine humanity." See W. Lawrence Hogue, "The Limits of Modernity: Andrea Lee's Sarah Phillips," The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States 19.4(1994):75-90. Finally, Valerie Smith contends that Sarah's wealth and upbringing "compromise" her ability to take action when Henri insults her. See the foreword in Sarah Philips. Lee x.

[361] Adrienne McCormick asserts that Sarah Philips is an African American woman who is without the means—family, members of her race, female comrades, or enough money-- to care for herself. Thus, she must depend on the support of her lover Henri. All of these elements play a role in why she does not challenge his racist and sexist remarks and behavior. See Andrienne McCormick, "Is This Resistance: African-American Postmodernism in Sarah Philips," Callaloo 27.3 (2004): 808-828.

[362] As Don M Enomoto alludes, it is only an attempt because Sarah is "ill-equipped to deal with(in) a society that defines her solely by her difference. Also, her

parents keep her African American history and culture at a distance so she does not know it as her own and as valuable." See "Irreconcilable Differences: "Creative Destruction" and the Fashioning of a Self in Sarah Phillips" The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States 24.1 (1999): 226.

[363] McCormick 813.

[364] Jesse Fauset's novels (re)presented the African American middle class and upper-middle class milieu of African Americans, particularly women in her novels such as Chinaberry Tree and There is Confusion.

[365] Aliona L. Gibson, Nappy: Growing Black and Female in America (New York: Harlem River Press, 2000) 12

[366] Natural hair is virgin hair that grows from the follicle on the head, according to Ferrell and Lattimore. Pamela Ferrell and Carmen Lattimore, Where Beauty Touches Me: Natural Care and Beauty Book (Washington: Cornrows and Company, 1993)16.

[367] This view is put forward with the hope that straightened hair might help Gibson in obtaining the job she applied for. This sentiment reflects similar sensibilities that some African American women embraced during segregation when they straightened their hair to have an appearance that looked as though it was "carefully groomed" to arm them against racism. See Julia Blackwelder, Styling Jim Crow: African American beauty Training during Segregation (College Station: Texas A&M university Press, 2003) 6.

[368] The cost of having hair straightened at the time cost $40.00. Gibson 31.

[369] Gibson 12.

[370] While I use Lacan in this study, I also employ Laing's object-relations theory to explicate the role hair plays in the development and performance of identities. Particularly, my concern is with the terms of identity of these two theorists and how they are in conflict. For instance, Lacan thinks all selves/identities are fictive (the psyche is eternally divided and the self as we know it is a product of the misrecognition of oneself as a unified entity that develops in the mirror stage), whereas Laing, argues that there is a "real" and a "false" self. In the example with Gibson I am using Laing to explore Laing's concept of the "false" self. In other areas where I make use of Lacan I am referring to his contention that the self is always fictive. See R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (New York: Penguin, 1960) 99.

[371] Laing 99.

[372] Quintin Hoare and G.Nowell Smith, ed. and trans. Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971) 333.

[373] Gibson 150.

[374] bell hooks, Killing Rage: Ending Racism (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995)162.

[375] Aliona Gibson personal webpage. "Biography" information. http://www.alionagibson.com.

[376] Judy Scales-Trent, Notes of a White Black Woman: Race, Color, Community (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995)7.

[377] Scales-Trent 17.

[378] According to Rose Weitz, in order for American women to look attractive their hair has to look as European as possible. See Rose Weitz, "Women and Their Hair:

Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation," Gender and Society 15.5 (2001):667-686.

[379] Maya Angelou, I know Why the Caged Bird Sings (New York, Random House, 1969) 2.

[380] Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1990) 83.

[381] For discussions on how members of exploited groups labor in their own victimization see the following: Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (London, Penguin Books, 1963), Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

[382] The rhetoric of "Black is Beautiful" was an attempt by some African Americans to consciously fight words and images that negatively contributed to some African Americans feeling that their skin and hair was inferior to that of whites. See Eldridge Cleaver, "Crinkly as Yours," Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel' Readings in the interpretation of Afro-American Folklore ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973) 9-21.

[383] Haki Madhubuti, Groundwork: New and Selected Poems of Don Lee/Haki R. Madhubuti from 1966-1996 (Chicago: Third World Press, 1996) 26.

[384] Anderson 5-7.

[385] Scales-Trent 53.

[386]Reginald McKnight, "Confessions of a Wanna be Negro," Lure and Loathing: Essay on Race, Identity, and Ambivalence of Integration, ed. Gerald Early (New York: Lane, 1993)104.

[387] Scales-Trent 56.

[388] Scales-Trent 28.

[389] Kobena Mercer, Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge, 1990) 43.

[390] McKnight 104.

[391] Paul Gilroy contends that individuals make their own identity, but they do so under other's circumstances and resources that are placed upon them, thereby performing an identity that is not complete. See Paul Gilroy, "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity," Identity and Difference, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: Sage, 1997) 301.

[392] Samira Kawash, "The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man: (Passing for) Black Passing for White" Passing and the Fictions of Identity, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996)59-74.

[393] Marco De Marinis, trans. Aine O'Healy, The Semiotics of Performance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 157.

[394] The Qur'an states the following about about women covering their bodies. The Qur'an states: "O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women to bring down over themselves (part) of their outer garments. That is most convenient that they should be known (as chaste, believing women) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." Qur'an 33:59. It seems here that the hijab is prescribed for Muslim woman that want to be recognized as modest. However, the Quar'an states that both genders must be modest in their dress and behavior. See The Holy Qur'an trans.

Allamah Nooruddin, Abdul Mannan, and Amatul Rahma Omer (Washington: Noor Foundation International, 1997) 24:30-31.

[395] Sonsyrea Tate, Little X: Growing Up In the Nation of Islam (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997) 56.

[396]Edward Curtis, "Islamizing the Black Body: Ritual and Power in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam," Religion and American Culture 12. 2 (2002):167-196.

[397] Tate 167.

[398] There is an impressive body of scholarship that explores the contradictions of Tate's mother's point of view of headpieces or hijab. See Nilufer Gole, The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Sondra Hale, Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., Women, Islam, and the State (London: Macmillan, 1991); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Women and Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran: Divorce, Veiling, and Emerging Feminist Voices," Women and Politics in the Third World, ed. Haleh Afshar (London: Routledge, 1996)142-69; Valentine M. Moghadam, ed., Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); and Nayareh Tohidi, "Modernity, Islamization, and Women in Iran," Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (London: Zed, 1994) 110-47.

[399] In this study Carolyn Moxley Rouse interviewed several women that did not straighten their hair but instead wore some "natural" hairstyles or dread locks. See Carolyn Moxley Rouse, Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 14.

[400] Curtis 177.

[401] Tate 100.

[402] Tate 190.

[403] Moxley Rouse states that the "hijab is a covering---a "curtain"—in order to encourage modesty and lawful behavior in Muslim women." Moxley Rouse 223 n2.

[404] Tate 187-189.

[405] McKnight 111.

[406] Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Pelletz, eds., Bewitching Women, Pious Men. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[407] Rouse 63-64.

[408] Toni Morrison, Jazz (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) 3-5.

[409]For additional examinations of Morrison's Jazz and signification see, for example, Malin Walther Pereira's "Periodizing Toni Morrison's Work from The Bluest Eye to Jazz: The Importance of Tar Baby," The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States 22.3 (1997): 71-82.

[410] Morrison (1997) 139.

[411] Morrison (1997) 149.

[412] For discussions on the one-drop theory see the following: James F. Davies, Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 200); Matthew Press Guterl, The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004)

[413] Denise Heinze discusses how Violet's grandmother True Belle's stories about Dorcas contribute to Violet's obsession with whiteness. Denise Heinze, The Dilemma of "Double Consciousness" Toni Morrison's Novels (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993) 24.

[414] Morrison (1997) 5.

[415] Morrison (1997) 85.

[416] Morrison (1997)77-78.

[417] Morrison (1997) 143.

[418] Morrison (1997) 201.

[419] Deborah McDowell Recovery Missions: Imaging the Body Ideals in Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women, ed. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 307.

[420] Jan Assman, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" Cultural History/Cultural Studies 65 (1995):125-133.

[421] Morrison (1997) 75.

[422] For a discussion on how memories influence body and the individual. See, Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)109-11.

[423] See, Sigmund Freud, The Uncanny trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 363.

[424] Morrison (1997) 15.

[425] Historically some African Americans worked in the beauty industry before state law regulated hair hairdressing. See Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation (College State:Texas A&M University Press, 2003) 5-7.

[426] Morrison (1997) 5.

[427] Morrison (1997) 229.

[428] Toni Morrison, "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib," New York Times Magazine Aug. 1971: 14-15.

[429] Heinze 15.

[430] Danzy Senna, Caucasia (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998) 1.

[431] Senna 43.

[432] Senna 45.

[433] Senna 285-286.

[434] For a discussion on the essence of Blackness see, for example, Stephen E. Henderson, "Saturation: Progress Report on a Theory of Black Poetry," African American Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. Napier Winston (New York: New York University Press, 2000)112.

[435] I am borrowing E. Patrick Johnson's assertions that hair and the African American body "exposes the social, political, economic, and psychological effects of racism and the role racism has played in defining blackness." See E. Patrick Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Polities of Authenticity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 40.

[436] Senna 413.

[437] Naomi Zack, "Different Forms of Mixed Race: Microdiversity and Destablization," Race in the 21st Century, ed. Curtis Stokes, Theresa Melendez, and Genice Rhodes-Reed (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 200) 53.

[438]Rebecca Walker, Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of Shifting Self (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001) 69.

[439] Walker (2001) 69-70.

[440] Walker (2001) 72.

[441] Walker (2001) 126.

[442] Walker (2001) 125-126.

[443] Walker (2001) 304.

[444] Raboteau 14-15.

[445] Psychologists Mamie and Kenneth Clark showed groups of African American and white children two African American dolls and two white dolls and asked them to pick the dolls that were good, bad, and pretty. The study demonstrated that both groups of children connected the white dolls with the positive attributes and negative attributes to the black dolls, indicating that racism had negatively contributed to African American children's development. See Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark, Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center (New York: Routledge 1999).

[446] Emily Prager, "Our Barbies, Ourselves," The Brief New Bedford Reader, ed. X.J. Kennedy, Dorothy M. Kennedy, and Jane E. Aaron (New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 2002) 706.

[447] Raboteau 170.

[448] Raboteau 172.

[449] For images of Topsy, see, for example, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (New York: Bantam Books, 1981) 236.

[450] Here, Stowe states that Topsy just grows. Stowe 236.

[451] Raboteau 177.

[452] Lacan (1977) 2.

[453] Martia Golden situates the Williams sisters as African American beauties, but she finds Serena's blond hair troubling. See Martia Golden, Don't Play in the Sun: One Woman's Journey Through the Color Complex (New York: Doubleday, 2004)134.

[454] Golden 141. It is important to note the connection to blond hair and African American women in popular culture, particularly film. For example, in the wildly successful movie "Meet the Fockers" I can not recall any African Americans in the film save a poster of the blond haired Lil Kim with her legs spread wide open. There are many signifiers here.

[455] Joy Bennett Kinnon, "Serena as You've Never Seen Her Before," Ebony Oct. 2002:21.

[456] The Williams sisters are not the media's celebrated image of femininity and sexuality in the world of tennis. Such distinctions are reserved for young white women like Anna Kournikova and Maria Sharapova. See Ealasaid Gilfillan, "F Word," Sports Illustrated Aug. 2004:13.

[457] It's also possible that some African American women that change their hair color to blond might be merely having fun.

[458]John Hope Franklin, ed., Three Negro Classics: Up From Slavery, The Souls of Black Folk, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (New York: Avon Books, 1965) 50.

[459] "Loving Rightly" on March 28, 2001 at Graham Chapel at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, Trans. Christopher J. Carley, http://www.mprsnd.org/interview/hooks.htm.

[460] Ann Powers, "The Notorious K.I.M," New York Times 14 July 2000, Times Section A: 19.

[461] See the following, Angela Davis, Blues Legacies:and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1993); Rana A. Emerson, "Where My Sister's At?: Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos," Gender and Society 16.1 (2002):115-135.

[462] Golden 141.

[463] Johnson 105.

[464]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha, ed. "Subaltern studies: Deconstructing Historiography," Selected Subaltern Studies (London: Oxford University Press, 1988) 32.

[465] Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994) 20.

[466] I appreciate Professor Terry's reminder that Serena and Venus Williams have had beads in their hair. However, since Serena and Venus became young women I have not seen any evidence of said braids.

[467] Golden 142.

[468] Golden 154. Also see the following for a discussion on skin bleaching and how it contributes to the politicizing the African Body: Charles Didier Gondola, "Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth," African Studies Review 42.1(April 1999): 23-38.

[469] For a discussion on how these creams weaken the melanin creating cells in the skin and thereby increase the chances of skin cancer. See G.H Findlay and H A de Beer, "Chronic hydroquinone poisoning of the skin from skin-lightening cosmetics: A South African Epidemic of Ochronosis of the face in Dark-Skinned Individuals," South African Medical Journal 9.57 (1980):187-90.

[470] Jose Esteban Munoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 78.

[471] Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 251.

[472] Here I am using Kevin Gaines' notion of uplift, which contends that "uplift" is the struggle and desire for realistic, positive, and healthy racial identification in a racist society. See, for example, Kevin K. Gaines, Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 19-46. Also, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," Signs 17 (1992) 11 and Evelyn Newman Phillips, "Doing More Than Heads African American Women Healing,

Resisting, and Uplifting Others in St. Petersburg, Florida," Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 22.2 (2001):25-42.

CHAPTER IV

(RE) READING AFRICAN AMERICAN HAIR POLITICS AND IDENTITY PERFORMANCES IN SELECTED FILMS

"No one wants a nappy headed woman!"

We are asking the audience to see things anew…As a filmmaker, I have found that Black America audiences are ….hungry to see their own image or the image of any Black person on the screen, that they can make that jump, that suspension of disbelief, and accept a film that has a style radically different from what they are used to.[473] *---Zeinbu Davis*

Many African American female filmmakers have decided to use cinema to disrupt hegemonic means of seeing and thinking about African American women as subjects that are striving toward exploring and recovering the significance of African American women's history, lived experiences,[474] and liberation. The identity performances of African American women in these films echo Trinh Minh-ha's divergent idea of identity:

> Identity is a re-departing. Rather, the return to a denied heritage allows one to start again with different re-departures, different pauses, different arrivals.[475]

Minh-ha illustrates that the re-departure to self-defined identity performance is a difficult process in a world where at the same time one has no names and too many names already.[476] This chapter focuses on the films of Ayoka Chenzira's films, "Zajota and the Boogie Spirit" and "Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People," Julie Dash's "Daughters of the Dust," Leslie Harris' "Just Another Girl on the IRT", and Cheryl Dunye's "Watermelon Woman" and how these artist use their cinematic gaze to engage in a dialogue with their audience about how African American women want to

(re)construct and renarrate an aspect of their identity through their hair. In this sense, these films work as conduct text,[477] that is to say, they teach others how to read the film as a text and show how African American women might/should perform an aspect of their identity. The films of Chenzira, Dash, Harris, and Dunye were chosen because their work confronts conventional cinematic paradigms by (re)situating African American women from the margins of film to the center of the narrative in order to (re)consider and demonstrate the dynamic and transgressive nature of their identity performances.

Ayoka Chenzira

In her animated films *Zajota and the Boogie Spirit* and *Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People*, Ayoka Chenzira examines how African American hair has been construed as a "problem" devoid of aesthetic value since the first Africans arrived in the New World. *Zajota and the Boogie Spirit* is a folk narrative about Zajota, an African ancestral spirit that follows the Africans from their native lands to the New World. Chenzira wants her audience to understand and embrace the notion that the Zajota is alive and well in the Africans' memories, drums (which are later refashioned as a boom box), dance, language, creativity, and hair. Chenzira uses hair to illuminate the prideful and creative side of African Americans by showing a myriad of hairstyles ranging from Afros,[478] dreadlocks, and asymmetrical cuts, to high top fades that reference Africa in their aesthetic. Chenzira suggests that wearing a natural hairstyle is one way to pay homage to the Boogie spirit and the sacrifices and suffering of Africans in the New World.

Chenzira's second animated film *Hair Piece* specifically considers African American women's hair and identity politics throughout history. She begins by focusing on a crying child who is having her hair combed while narrator Carol Jean Lewis recites some tenets held by many African American women about their hair and selves. These tenets include "No one wants a nappy headed woman!" and "You can't get no job with nappy hair like that!" among others. These are followed by cries from other women bemoaning their nappy hair and how bad their hair makes them feel. These vignettes show how hair is deeply tied to politics of self-identity, self-esteem, and self-awareness for many African American women.[479] Chenzira further illuminates this connection by showing images of three cultural icons: African American hair care pioneer Madam C. J. Walker (holding her reconfigured French hot comb for African American women), Angela Davis (wearing her signature Afro), and Tina Turner (wearing a long flowing wig). She relates these different images to the names African Americans have called themselves over the years (e.g., Colored, Negro, and Black). Chenzira deliberately shows African American women with varieties of both hues and hair length to underscore the notion that each African American woman's hair and identity politics are distinctive and complex. These distinctive and complex images are presented as contrast to the image of Topsy from Uncle Tom's Cabin, further showing the utility of the African American woman's body (and her hair in particular) as a battle ground for identity politics.

Chenzira's film further shows the utility of the African American female body (and her hair in particular) as a battle ground for identity politics. Of the notion of how the body is a battleground Susan Bordo contends:

> the *body is a battleground whose self-determination has to be fought for. The metaphor of the body as a battleground, rather than postmodern*

> *playground captures, as well, the practical difficulties involved in the political struggle to empower "difference".*[480]

In this passage Bordo suggests that a dialogue about power and identity politics cannot be seriously considered without addressing how issues of class, gender, race, and sexuality impact the body in question.

Chenzira's work is part of a growing body of films by African American women that are initiating dialogues to get African American female audiences to (re)conceptualize their hair and identity politics. Of this agenda Chenzira says, "One of the things I talk about in *Hair Piece* is that I think how you present yourself says a lot about who you think you are and in my mind most of us are really presenting ourselves as though we think we are of an inferior and deficient model.[481] In this sense, Chenzira's films and the work of other filmmakers functions as a counter narrative to films like the racially charged and stereotypical D. W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation that (mis)represents African Americans as violent, dumb, apolitical, ugly criminals.

Chenriza's films also serve as a means for African American women to envision their identity and hair politics. That is to say, popular culture simultaneously subverts and reproduces hegemony.[482] On the one hand, Chenzira's film sets forth hairstyles and identity politics she deems appropriative for African American women considering their long history of loathing their selves. On the other hand, Chenzira's mandated hairstyles in turn reinforce hegemony from within the community onto other African American women. In other words, Chenzira implies that there are politically correct (natural styles) and incorrect hairstyles (chemically enhanced styles).

These tensions help in demonstrating that identity is a dynamic performance replete with contradictions. Overall, demonstrating for African American women the value of popular

culture is that it has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people.[483]

Chenzira's film is an attempt to rescue the African American female body on film from the dangerous stereotypes that have been historically produced by the dominant culture. Thus, Chenzira's film rebukes racist and sexist constructs and ideologies by presenting images and commentary that suggest that African American women's hair does not need to be controlled via permanents or other modes of straightening to be beautiful. The essence of this subversive film is Chenzira's encouragement for her audiences to critically think about why and how they have come to think the way they do about their hair in such negative terms. Chenzira also suggests that resisting white female normative beauty standards is key to performing as a healthy woman who not only loves herself and defines her own identity. This type of performance reflects Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque,[484] in that it allows for a new identity to be performed. However, Bakhtin's notion is not without criticism. Terry Eagleton asserts:

> Indeed carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare's Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed food.[485]

While Eagleton's assessment that the carnivalesque is sanctioned by the dominant culture is interesting, he misses the value of how Bakhtin's theory helps, in art in particular, by allowing those who have been marginalized by the dominant culture to critically expose the nature and function of hegemony. Additionally, the carnivalesque, in the case of Chenzira (and other African American filmmakers) enlightens the value of bodies in

society. In *"Zajota and the boogie Spirit"* it is clear that the white female body has a higher value than an African American female body. Chenzira's work illuminates these hierarchies and provides alternative images for African American women to use so that they might transform bodies, minds, hair, and identity politics from the grotesque (mis)representation in films produced by the dominant culture (such as Birth of a Nation) to (re)presentations that resemble actual African American women. Chenzira's film reflects what Michel Foucault refers to as "technologies of the self:" i.e., one's own capability to body, thoughts, and demeanor as means to help her transform themselves to achieve that which contributes to their personal sense of happiness and perfection.[486]

Chenzira ends her film with images of live action images of African American women wearing hairstyles that are free of chemicals. Chenzira is saying that by wearing their hair natural is the only way African American women should perform this aspect of their identity. To some viewers this sentiment displays blatant essentialism. This observation is correct, and what Chenzira is doing is exercising what Gayatari Spivak calls "strategic essentialism, a necessary moment."[487]

Her final statement includes this line:

> "If you have problems with your hair, perhaps the comb you use was not designed with your hair in mind."

Chenzira continues,

> "Perhaps now it's time to allow your hair to come into the full beauty of its own rebelliousness."

The ending of Chenzira's film demonstrates how African American women's film seeks to reclaim the African American female body from its status as object in popular culture and resituate her as subject. Furthermore, the "rebelliousness" Chenzira refers to

demonstrates the carnivalesque spirit of her work. On the one hand, Chenzira's film dares African American women to rebel against white normative white hair standards. On the other hand, Chenzira's actual filmmaking reflects her personal and professional transgressive[488] cultural production. In this sense, Chenzira's films represent a variety of possible identities for African American women to consider.[489] Her film is transformative because it situates African American women at the center of the text and disrupts previous (mis)representations of African American women just with its very existence. Again, this shows Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque as it relates to the subject of identity, thereby allowing Chenzira to complicate the notion of identity as a fixed concept and allowing for constant identity transformation. Chenzira's film reflects Stuart Hall's hope for (re)presenting identity in cinema:

> Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses represents, we should think, instead of identity as a "production" that is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation...reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are.[490]

Hall's declaration underscores that African Americans have agency in the way they (re)produce our identity politics and performances currently and in the future. In this sense, Chenzira's work dares her audience to look and think about the ideology which has contributed to a culture and consciousness that cause some African American women to hate their hair and (ultimately) themselves. Chenzira's film dares to ask the audience to think differently about African American women. Finally, Chenzira's film refutes the trend in contemporary culture to define African American women apart from the physical aspects of race.[491] Instead, her film echoes Althusser's argument that ideology

> ...operates not explicitly but implicitly; it lives in those practices, those structures, those images we take for granted. We internalize ideology and thus are not easily made conscious of its presence or its effects; it is unconscious. And yet, the unconscious has, within many philosophical frameworks, been seen as the core of our individuality, a product or our nature. [492]

Chenzira agrees with Althusser's belief that the self is formed by ideology. She believes that America's racist and sexist ideology has been so damaging to African American women that she ends her animated short film with images of "real" African America women wearing natural hairstyles. This ending sends a clear message of not only her political position in the hair and identity debate, but also on how African American women should conduct themselves---meaning wearing their hair in natural styles. Chenzira's work is significant not merely because it offers a recoding of African American women's identity and hair politics, but it also because it reveals the tensions about high, middle, and low popular culture. Specifically, Chenzira's work is a response and rebuke to the notion that a white female normative standard should be embraced. Chenzira does this by problematizing what Stallybrass and White refer to as the "classical" body:

> The classical body statue has no openings or orifices whereas grotesque costume and masks emphasize the gaping mouth, the protuberant belly and buttocks, the feet and the genitals. In this way the grotesque body stands in opposition to the bourgeois individualist conception of the body, which finds its image and legitimation in the classical. [493]

This description of the classical body clearly distinguishes the bourgeois body from the proletariat body Chenzira inverts the hierarchy thereby lowering the classical (white) body and allowing for the African American female body to be higher.

Julie Dash's critically acclaimed film *"Daughters of the Dust"* is a lush historical narrative that takes place at Ebo Landing in the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina at the turn of the century. Dash's film centers on the Peazant family, which has gathered for a send-off picnic before the majority of the family heads north. In order to capture the memory of their migration a photographer is commissioned to document the occasion. Dash uses the gathering as an opportunity to explore the "drama around Black hair"[494] beeause it speaks to one way that African American women they construct their identities.[495] As Dash herself notes, the film deliberately attempts to (re)define how African American women's identities appear on the silver screen:

> As a black woman you're bombarded by images like Revlon women pulling out her blow dryer like a gunfighter. Those things affect your concept of what you have to do to be a real woman. There's a lot of drama about black hair. Teacher's treating girls with soft straight hair nicer than those with short nappy hair. In other films you see women with all kinds of hairstyles and no one notiees. You have black women wearing something other than a doo-rag, and all of a sudden you're self-conscious in the follicle area. I wanted these women to look like nothing you've seen before and I wanted them to have ancient hairstyles.[496]

Dash uses the hairstyles (e.g., simple braids, cornrows, plaits, twists, short afros, short asymmetrical cuts, swept up chignon, short and medium length dreadlocks, and long and straight) of the Peazant women and children as a means for understanding some African American women's identity politics. The hairstyles that Dash depicts redress images such as the mammy, Topsy and Farina that have been fed to audiences throughout the world as representations of African American women.

For instanee, Dash characters Yellow Mary and Eula represent the artistie expression of African American women's hair. Dash also uses her film to redress the misrepresentations of African American women by placing a variety of hues and body

shapes as more aesthetically appealing women in her narrative, as is evident in Yellow Mary's free flowing mane and Eula's thick braids. Such effort sends the message that there is not one singular version of African American female beauty. In this sense, Dash attempts to subvert mainstream Hollywood's placement of only fair skinned African Americans like Rae Dawn Chong, Lonette McKee, or Halle Berry. Dash's film imagines, for her audiences, the possibility of alternative identities for African American women.[497] Also, Dash's film illustrates that the African American woman's body is never truly (re)presented, but instead constructs what Bakhtin would call a body double.[498] This body double reflects the grotesque imagery in Dash's film, allowing for a rupturing and inversion of dominant hierarchies and values about beauty standards and politics and showing that there is another way to look at and understand African American women's hair. In this manner the film functions as a conduct text for African American women, who should be their own measuring stick for beauty. Since the majority of the hairstyles Dash shows in the film are natural hairstyles, the audience can read Dash as saying that African American women should wear their hair in such styles[499] and that there is no need to embrace a white female hair aesthetic. This point is underscored when Dash has an unidentified young woman in a scene where she sits alone and awkwardly tries to straighten her hair with a hot knife. This image is in stark contrast to the communal process of hair braiding, caring for and combing the hair is where the women are smiling, talking, and bonding with one another. It is this scene that serves to illustrate how[500] hair braiding is a means of helping African American women come to understand the value and beauty of their hair and bodies, and the importance of community and heritage as

they continue to (re)position and perform their identities within a meaningful socio-historic structure.[501]

In another example, Dash uses the hair and name of Nana Peazant's daughter-in-law, Haagar to show how hair reflects one's identity performance.[502] Haagar, the only woman with hair that looks as if it has been straightened, talks incessantly about her education and her desire to leave the island and the family's antiquated notions of culture behind. Haagar is the only family member who refuses to participate in the "kiss the protection" ritual[503] Nana Peazant organizes. This illuminates how Haagar places the mainland (read white) culture over the culture of her ancestors. In effect, Dash seems to be saying that Haagar performs part of her identity as an unenlightened and disenfranchised African American woman through her straightened hairstyle.[504] In contrast, Haagar's daughter Myown, who has hair free of chemicals that is twisted into large plaits, does not show any indication that she will abandon her cultural roots once she has departed the island. In fact, when Myown leaves the island, she does so with pieces of her family's history in a long tin can, Nana Peazant's charm around her neck, and the sense that she will make her mark in the North while maintaining the cultural and aesthetic traditions from her island home.

Dash also explores hair outside of the realm of the aesthetic and shows how hair serves as a way for the women to gather as a community and recall the past. Before leaving the island, Nana Peazant talks to the other women about a lock of her mother's hair having played a central role in her life:

> "When I was a child, my mother cut this from her hair before she was sold away from us."[505]

Nana Peazant's mother's hair has provided her with comfort and protection. So, as she contemplates the departure of her family, she places her own hair and the hair of their ancestors along with other "scraps of memories" into a small leather pouch called a "hand" that will protect them. When her task is complete, she says:

> Now, I'm adding my own hair. There must be a bond...a connection, between those that go up North, and those who across the sea. A connection! We are as two people in one body. The last of the old, and the first of the new. We will always live this double life, you know, because we are from the sea. We came here in chains, and we must survive. We must survive. There's a salt-water in our blood...[506]

It is evident from Nana's dialogue that Dash uses hair as a way for the family to maintain their roots as they make new routes in the North. In fact, the hair contained in the "hand" is used as a blessing for the departing Peazant family. As they prepare to leave Nana Peazant holds the "hand" with their ancestral hair and says:

> This "Hand", it's from me, from us, from them (the Ibo)...Just like all of you...Come children, kiss this hand full of me."[507]

Nana Peazant continues,

> "I'm the one that can give you strength...Take me wherever you go. I'm your strength."[508]

In these excerpts Dash invokes DuBois's notion of double consciousness:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's should by the tape of the worlds that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels their twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.[509]

This theme of double consciousness is strong in Dash's film and underscores the need for self-produced identities in the Peazant family, as an example of how African Americans always feel as if they linger between two worlds.

In another example of how hair reflects community, Dash has the Peazant women gather to comb and style each other's hair, laugh, cook, quilt, talk, and care for each other and their children.[510] In fact, within this community of women there is a main woman called "Hairbraider" who cares for the women's hair. Dash lingers over Hairbraider as she boards the transport at the end of the film, perhaps to highlight for the audience that she will assist and teach others how to maintain and remember their island hair aesthetic as they perform an aspect of their identity on the mainland. This moment in Dash's film echoes Ricoeur's contention that it is the (re)configuration of the past that enables one to refigure the future.[511] Furthermore, Dash uses the process of one African American woman braiding the hair of another African American woman as a map that documents the Peazant family's migration North. The hairbraiding map is used to illuminate the route the Peazant family will take as they travel to the mainland, the braided hair is foregrounded to visually mark the importance of making sure as they take the route North they do not forget their African roots.[512] In this way, the character Hairbraider and the hair map both function means knowing who these people are and where they came from. What is meant here is that the Hairbraider will be present to care for the hair and style it in a fashion that celebrates and shows their identity and heritage. The hair braid map is a reminder that they have a connection to their ancestral island.

Dash provides the audience with two examples of how life in the north will not bode well for the Peazant family. Specifically, Dash uses the hair of Viola and Yellow Mary to help her audience understand the dubiousness of the move to the mainland. Viola, who has been living on the mainland, enthusiastically plans to help the other Peazants get acclimated to their new environment when they arrive. Yet, when Viola moved north she quickly learned from individuals on the mainland that her culture and faith were inferior to western White culture and Christianity. Viola subsequently moved away from Nana Peazant's Yoruba faith and teachings, and instead embraced Christianity. Viola's embrace of the ethos of the North and repression of her rich African heritage enables her to embrace the romanticized promise of better life on the mainland. When Viola returns to Igbo Landing she is carrying a bible and proselytizing, and wearing her hair bound up tightly. Viola said, "When I left these islands, I was a sinner and I didn't know even know it. But I left these islands, touched the mainland, and fell into the arms of the Lord."[513] Yellow Mary, like Viola, has also lived on the mainland and abroad and she mocks some of the islands sensibilities (even though she remains on the island). She, however, returns form the north wiser from experience, with hair that appears wild and free, but tired, like it has been in a battle and tells part of her story. In fact, so obvious is this battle that Nana Peazant carefully looks Yellow Mary over, searching her face, clothing, and hair for signs of her struggle. While Yellow Mary verbally reveals little her decision to remain on the island speaks volumes of how the mainland had taken its toll on her entire body, including her hair. Yellow Mary's hair wildly surrounds her tired face, keeping her secrets and giving the impression of one who has seen too much and returns to Igbo Landing to rejuvenate herself---to heal from the romanticized love affair on the

mainland that has gone bad. Thus, Viola and Yellow Mary's straightened hair serves as foreshadowing that the move north is a mistake. That is to say, going north (without the protection charm) will overwhelm the Peazants and they will lose their identity and culture in an attempt to fit in. Nana Peazant knows the migration north will challenge her family, and perhaps she searches Yellow Mary's hair for some indication of how bad the north will treat her descendents. Whether Nana Peazant sees anything in Yellow Mary's hair or not, she knows that hair is a component of protecting and maintaining familial ties.

Dash is saying to her audience that the Peazants' numerous memories, cultural traditions, and material culture are bound up in the strength of the hair that holds the souls of their ancestors and themselves, and maintaining their cultural traditions (i.e., maintaining African hairstyles) will be enough for them to make their way in an unknown world. Also trying to make her way in the world is independent filmmaker Leslie Harris' heroine Chantel in "*Just Another Girl on the IRT.*" Harris exposes her audience to the little seen world of African American teenage girls in her film "Just Another Girl on the IRT," which is unusual since in many contemporary African American films which center on 'youth', the term 'youth' become synonymous with African American males. This is an alternative of producing another film where as Karen Alexander puts it "Black women are not mere sexual sideshows or threats to black manhood.[514] Harris presents a hip-hop love sonnet, about a young urban African American female. In "*Just Another Girl on the IRT,*" Harris tells precocious teenage Chantel's story of her last year in high school as she dreams of going to medical school while trying to hide an unplanned pregnancy. Additionally, Harris allows the camera to linger over Chantel's tresses. Chantel does not

have middle class, crinkly curls cascading down her shoulders; nor does she have a straight hair flowing in the wind.[515] Harris's heroine Chantel has braids. Here, Chantel's braids function as a signifier for racial identity. The hairstyle of Harris's protagonist recalls Kobena Mercer's contention that for many young "blacks" within the diaspora, hair has long been one of the sites where identity is expressed.[516] Thus, Chantel's braided hairstyle that is read by the dominant culture is a signifier of fear. For example, while working in a grocery store, Chantel encounters a white female patron that is rude to her and Chantel responds in kind. The woman becomes nervous and frightened.

Echoes of Chantel's braids as a signifier for fear are seen in the 1991 court case of Renee Rogers. Rogers was terminated from her job as a flight attendant for American Airlines because her superiors felt her braids would frighten their patrons. They ordered Rogers to remove the braids, straighten her hair, and style it in a fashion they deemed appropriate and presentable. Rogers promptly sued American Airlines. However, the court ruled against Rogers and upheld her termination.[517] As African American braids continue to be misread, films like Harris provide contradictory notions of braids. In other words, the braids can be read as non- threatening /dangerous and intelligent on the heroine. Harris appears to be saying that African American young girls can wear the braids and still conduct themselves as productive and intelligent citizens. Her film also sends the message of how her audience might conduct themselves by having an open mind when encountering African Americans with braids, particularly female youths.

Chantel's braids are so important that they are part of the film company Miramax's press information for Harris' film:

> "Chantel's signature braids, slammin' outfits, and flip mouth scream Attitude, with a capital "A". In an environment full of perilous traps for

> African American teens, Chantel's attitude is a badge of survival, a method of control."[518]

In the press release, the braids signify sassy attitude as part of Chantel's identity. In the movie, however, Chantel usually reserves her sassy attitude for those who condescend to her. It would seem that Chantel's hair has little to do with expressing an "attitude" and may instead be an expression of her teenage angst.[519] Harris uses her braids to reflect some African American youths' attempts to reposition themselves and also reconfigure and disrupt those cultural, moral, and political discourses which invariably police, contain, and otherwise discipline them.[520] Finally, Harris' use of braids can be used to extend the audience's understanding of individuals beyond race, class, or gender. Thus, illuminating Teresa de Lauretis claim that women and men are not purely sexual or merely racial, economic, or sub cultural, but all of these together and in conflict with each other.[521]

One asset of independent filmmakers is their ability to liberate themselves and their audiences from the confines of racist and sexist beliefs by producing alternative ways of (re)constructing African American female identities. This capability is evident in Cheryl Dunye's film *"The Watermelon Woman,"* which, like the previous films, also operates from the premise of creating alternative ways of (re)constructing African American female identities—particularly African American lesbian identities. Dunye produced *"The Watermelon Woman"* because "there was a dearth of information on lesbian and film history of African American women…since it wasn't happening, I invented it." [522] Like Julie Dash's *"Daughters of the Dust,"* Dunye's film is a historical narrative which centers on Cheryl, a twenty something African American lesbian filmmaker[523] who sets out to make a documentary about Fae Richards, a 1930s African American lesbian

actress.[524] Cheryl is trying to define herself and wants to have a subject to film that will assist her in this endeavor. She also wants to (re)construct an identity that does not replicate the stereotypical images of African American lesbians presented in mainstream cinema.[525] Moreover, Cheryl's film is an attempt (like other African American female filmmakers) to recover a sense of black women's history, and to affirm their cultural and political place in the expanding arena of black cinema production.[526]

One notable instance in the "Watermelon Woman" is Cheryl's stating that Fae was "the most beautiful mammy," which sends Cheryl's audience the message that the old image of the ugly and asexual mammy is a lie. To legitimatize her contention, Cheryl has real life cultural critic Camille Paglia concur with her disruption by having Paglia dub Mammy a goddess. In this sense, Cheryl, a lesbian (like images of lesbians in other films) whose image is also construed as deviant and negative,[527] identifies with Fae both as an African American woman in film history and culture and as a lesbian. However, Cheryl's identification with Fae is not without complexities. For example, Cheryl makes her own movie, placing herself in the role she chooses, unlike her "Sapphic sister" Fae, who desires to be considered by the film industry for feminine and glamorous roles instead of only the role of the mammy.

In all-African American or "race films" Fae played a variety of roles from saint to sinner. Yet, these so called race films do not satisfy Fae, who still yearned for the elusive success in mainstream cinema. The head shots Fae has taken of herself with her long straightened mane carefully mimics[528] these white female actresses of her time. However, Fae's glamorous hair and makeup does not result in attention from mainstream cinema, which continues to cast the dark skinned Fae in roles which are largely perceived as asexual.

Furthermore, even in all-black cast films, Fae would not have been situated as the glamorous beauty: such roles were typically given to light-skinned actresses like Nina Mae McKinney.[529] Even after an affair with white lesbian filmmaker Martha Page and the hope that her glamorously styled hair, makeup, and seductive pose might help move her into mainstream cinema roles, Fae is still restricted to marginal roles, like maid or mammy. Unlike Fae, Cheryl performs a butch look, with unisex clothes and hair shaved close to her scalp.[530] Cheryl's lesbian short hairstyle and masculine demeanor allow her to discard the political and patriarchal notions of sexuality and femininity. Indeed, Cheryl's short hairstyle and clothing mark her as transgressive[531] and contribute to her being mistaken grabbed by the police as an African American male drug addict suspect.[532] That is to say, Cheryl is punished and detained by the police because of her looks and "butch" performance. These elements of her identity contradict the policemen's understanding of their patriarchal notions about the identity of the female body.[533] Cheryl's incident with the police underscores that the body can be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles.[534] Thus, Cheryl's hair and other aspects of her appearance do not allow her to perform as a butch lesbian without having others inscribing other racist and gendered notions on her body. The harassment she receives because of her hair and identity politics performance illustrates the claim of Comaroff and Comaroff that oppression circulates through the black body. [535]

Cheryl also includes other examples of how hair matters in the lives and identity politics of African American women. For example, Cheryl and her new white lover, Diana, join

Cheryl's best friend and business partner Tamara and her lover, Stacy, at their home for dinner. The dinner is stilted because Tamara disapproves of Cheryl's dating a white woman. As the women engage in uncomfortable small talk and have drinks, a large photograph of Angela Davis[536] (a "Sapphic sister") wearing an Afro, dominates the scene. The image of Davis's Afro appears to loom over the diners' heads and functions as symbols of both pro-racial and lesbian pride and visibility.[537] In this manner, Davis acts as a role model of acceptability for young lesbian African American women struggling to perform and (re)construct their identities in ways that (re)capture and (re)produce historical images of African American lesbians[538] so that others may come to understand and know these women exist and that they refuse to allow the dominant culture to define their images in cinema or the real world.

In a scene that echoes scenes from Chenzira's *"Hair Piece"* and Dash's film *"Daughters of the Dust,"* Cheryl showcases a bevy of African American women at an Afrocentric female poetry group called Sistah Sound at a local women's community center who are all wearing their hair in natural styles. This moment sends a message similar to that of Chenzira's that films can be both entertaining and demonstrative of ways of conducting one's identity. Indeed, Cheryl seems to be saying in this scene that white femininity is not needed as a qualifier for beauty. And, according to Cheryl, African American women (of all hues, shapes, and sizes) concerned with controlling their bodies will embrace the early 1970s idea that natural hair is attractive, political, and illustrate connections to their African roots.[539]

Another critical moment in "The Watermelon Woman" occurs when Cheryl reviews Fae's work as a mammy in the film "Plantation Memories" and records the image of herself saying Fae's lines in unison. Both Fae and Cheryl are covering their hair. However, while Fae wears a mammy rag, Cheryl removes her mammy rag, exposing her near bald head and smirks at the audience (instead of mammy's trademark grin).[540] In this instance, Cheryl is "testifyin" i.e., in the black vernacular, linking narrator and audience together.[541] Cheryl is 'testifyin" that the image of the mammy will not be resurrected and is unmistakably dead in her cinematic world. Cheryl defiantly non-verbally repeats what others have said; namely, that in her films African American women will not be reduced to functionaries of white fantasies, deprived of any life experience that was purely personal and black.[542] Furthermore, as Cheryl's body is juxtaposed to Fae's on the screen the audience is left to ponder the two mammy images. On the one hand, Fae's mammy, unlike other mammies in film history, is sexual. In fact, Cheryl positions Fae's mammy character to comfort her mistress with her arm wrapped closely around the mistress's body, suggesting lesbian desire.[543]

On the other hand, if Cheryl's audience is not savvy they might see her mammy rag and smirk and mistaking the smirk for a grin, think that since Cheryl is so committed to preserving Fae's life on film. Here, if the viewer thinks Fae can serve as a role model, then her wearing of the wig might signal neo-mammy notions. This might be the case if Cheryl continued to wear the mammy rag (kerchief-tied): however, she takes the mammy rag off. And, even if Cheryl had continued to wear the mammy rag, some audiences might see her actions in terms of second-wave feminism whereby individuals reclaim words and ideas to celebrate the qualities traditionally denigrated by the use of the term

or item. As Cheryl celebrates Fae's life in her documentary, she is in no way situating herself as a neo-mammy. The smirk and removal of the red mammy handkerchief revealing a bald head is a powerful statement on Cheryl's (re)presentation identity and the cinematic space she plans to use as a showcase, conjuring up Susan Brownmiller's assertion:

> once a woman was free of the coil at the nape of her neck, it became her urgent mission to seek out new ways to feminize her head."[544]

In this sense, Cheryl's near hairless head rebukes society's tradition of imposed limitations of femininity. With this film Cheryl's seems committed to not participating in inscribing restrictive notions on the bodies of African American women by being a reproducer of the docile body of the femininity.[545]

Cheryl wears her hair low and reflects her own notion of femininity and liberation to identity as a lesbian. So free is the near bald Cheryl that she smirks into the camera giving her in the know viewing audience the impression that she cares little for the previous stereotypes that restricted, dehumanized, and desexed African American women. Cheryl also cares little what the audience thinks of her, her hair and identity, or sexual orientation. Her smirk lets her audience know her belief that the mammy is ultimately a sad joke that she will not participate in when she removes the mammy rag. In this sense, the removal of the mammy rag is a cinematic end to those old billings of African Americans as Coon, Tom, "the colored Cagney," "the black Valentino," or "the sepia Mae West." [546] Cheryl's removal of the mammy rag and her sly smirk sends the message that she knows that she, and other African American female filmmakers have

the power to control the way the tell their stories and the way African American women will appear in popular culture.[547]

The removal of the mammy rag also reflects Cheryl's and other African American women filmmakers' refusal to make themselves smaller in a racist and patriarchal world. To borrow from Susan Brownmiller on this issue, women concerned with feminine esthetics must deny "solidity by rearranging, accentuating or drastically reducing some portion of the female anatomy or some natural expression of the flesh." [548] Thus, Cheryl's removal of the rag and the reduction of the hair also destabilizes the old notion that African American lesbian's sexuality is typically suggested at (rather than seen).[549] Cheryl's removal of the mammy rag lets her audience know that her films will not hid or struggle but will explicitly show lesbian bodies, identities, and sexuality.

The removal of the mammy rag is not the only time Cheryl sends the message that she will not longer hide lesbian identity and sexuality. Another notable example involves the provocative love making scene between herself and her lover Diana. Although the scene has a beautiful and organic quality, Cheryl's angular body and near bald hair cut briefly conjure up notions of maleness. The audienee might have to quickly remind themselves that they are indeed watching two women, of whom one has a rather "butch" aesthetic and identity.[550] In this instance, Cheryl's butch body echoes the view that the body is of dominant values and conceptions and can also be a site for resistance to and transformation of dominations values and systems of meaning.[551] The sex scene functions to transform audience's views about what lesbians look like, how some lesbians think, and how some lesbians behave.

Cheryl's film uses the hair and the lesbian African American body to address women's active and knowing grappling with opposing cultural discourses of feminism, racism, sexism, homophobia, beauty, and what should and should not be done to the female body. In this sense Cheryl's film answers Bambara's[552] rhetorical query: "Why new black cinema?" Cheryl's reply is rooted in the understanding that "new black cinema" must rebel, critique and labor against the existing cinematic order.[553] In order to carry out this rebellion the filmmaker must carefully examine how hair and identity politics (among other things) are shaped by multiple forces such as class, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Cheryl's use of the medium of film in popular culture presents an unflinching look at an African American lesbian's understanding of the hierarchies of racialized, sexualized, and gendered bodies in the dialogue of identity politics. Her performance attempts to get her audience to consider questions such as: "What does an African American lesbian look like", "how does she behave", "what is she interested in", and in general "what is her world like"? Some of the answers are in Cheryl's film, which presents images ranging from short haired butch lesbian to long haired femme lesbians. Thus, Cheryl's film says to her audience that there are many ways for lesbians perform their identities and there are many stories to tell to fill the void of African American lesbian film culture.[554] Finally, Cheryl's film is valuable because it provides a site to express a counterhegemonic view of African American lesbians. Cheryl does this by exploring body (including hair), identity, and history to demonstrate how African American lesbians negotiate, engage, and understand the world. Cheryl's character symbolizes an emergent independent African American womanhood that does not

advocate the embrace or performance of traditional western female aesthetics from inside or outside the African American community. In this sense, the work of Dunye as well as Harris, Dash, and Chenzira assists in helping African American women conduct and perform their identity, and (re)defining what it means to be an African American woman.

NOTES

[473] Zeinabu Irene Davis, "The Future of Black Film: The Debate Continues," Black Film Review 5 no. 3 (1990):6.

[474] African American cinema represents the topical issues relevant to African Americans argues Lott. See Tommy Lott, "A No Theory Theory of Contemporary Black Cinema," Black American Literature Forum, Volume25, No. 2 (Summer 1991): 221-236.

[475] Trinh H Minh-ha, "Cotton and Iron," Out There, Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, eds., Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) 328.

[476] Minh-ha 328.

[477] Foster suggests that conduct texts (literary and film) tell individuals how to behave aesthetically, socially, culturally, and politically. See Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, Troping the Body (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[478] According to Asante natural hairstyles, in particular, the Afro are "the most revolutionary cultural statement made by the African American community since Marcus Garvey's announcement that the white man's religion meant death to the African." See Molefi Kete Asante, Race, Rhetoric, and Identity: The Architecton of Soul (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2005) 52.

[479] Gloria Gibson-Hudson, "The Ties that Bind,"Black Women Film and Video Artist, ed. Jacqueline Bobo (New York: Routledge, 1998) 43-66.

[480] Susan Bordo Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 38. For additional discussions on how the body is a site for social control see Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Polities and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[481] Afua Kafi-Akua, "Ayoka Chenzira: Filmmaker," Sage 4.1 (Spring 1987):69-72.

[482] See, Robin D. G. Kelley's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk.'" American Historical Review. 97.5 (December 1992):1400-1408.

[483] Stuart Hall, "What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture,"Black Popular Culture, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992) 21-33.

[484] The carnivalesque refers to a leveling of the playing field. During this festival period there is an inversion of all hierarchical categories. It is a time of renewal, change, and equality for all according to Bakhtin. See Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 10.

[485] Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: Verson, 1981) 148.

[486] Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude,"On Signs: A Semiotic Reader, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 367.

[487] Gayatari Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (London: Methuen, 1987) 205.

[488]The model of transgressive referred to here is based on Michel Foucault's concept of transgression. Of this idea Foucault writes:

Perhaps one day it will seem as decisive for our culture, as much a part of its soil, as the experiences of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought...Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing for another, nor does it achieve its purpose through mockery...its role is to measure the excessive distance that it opens at the heart of the limit and to trace the flashing line that causes the limits to arise. Michel Foucault, The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, ed. Paul Rainbow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003) 445-446.

[489] Trey Ellis' asserts in his essay the "New Black Aesthetic " that all contemporary African American artists should not be overly concerned with race as the only mode of conflict in their lives, that these "new" artist should feel free to express themselves as they please because the world has changed. See Trey Ellis, New Black Aesthetic,"Callaloo 38 (1989): 233-43.

[490] Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," Exiles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema, ed. Mybe Cham (London: African World Press, 1992) 220-236.

[491] Toni Morrison contends in "What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib," that female beauty must only be rooted in racial identity and present no imitation of white female beauty standards. Morrison 15.

[492] Louis Althusser, "On Ideology and ideological State Apparatuses," Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) 239.

[493] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 22.

[494] See Greg Tate, "Of Homegirl Goddesses and Geechee Women: The Afrocentric Cinema of Julie Dash. The Village Voice 36 Jun 4 (1991): 72.

[495] Julie Dash, Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Woman's Film (New York: The New Press, 1992) 52-54.

[496] This excerpt is from Greg Tate and Arthur Jaffa, in "La Venus Negre," Artforum 30 (January 1992):91.

[497] I am borrowing from Kaja Silverman's assertion that "the lost object is not so much surrendered as relocated within the subject's own self...Freud explains that the reproaches which the melancholic seems to direct against him-or-herself are in fact directed against the once-loved object which he or she had internalized." See Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[498] The term body double is similar to that of an alter ego--the body double takes over identities. Bakhtin 318.

[499] In this manner, Dash's work invokes civil and human rights activist Malcolm X discussion in his autobiography where he uses lye to straighten his hair to appear attractive by white standards.

See Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964) 52-55. Also, Farah Jasmine Griffin contends that the process of chemically altering African American hair (re)inscribes the force of the oppressor on "Black bodies. See Farah Jasmine Griffin, Who Set You Flowin'?: The African-American Migration Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 136-137.

[500] Dash "Daughter's of the Dust" focuses on the nexus and construction of race, (and the role hair plays in these constructions) gender, class, and sexuality according to Smith. Valerie Smith, Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 10.

[501] Gloria J Gibson, "The Ties that Bind: Cinematic Representations by Black Women Filmmakers," Black Women Film and Video Artist, ed. Jacqueline Bobo (New York: Routledge, 1998) 47.

[502] Dashes uses hair as one element to (re)constructs aesthetics, identity, and contradicts (mis)representations in film from the point of view of African American women. See Clyde Taylor, "We Don't Need Another Hero: Anti-Theses on Aesthetics," Black Critical Frames, Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema, ed. Mbye D. Cham and Claire Andrade-Watkins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988) 80-85.

[503] This ritual involves kissing a charm (a tiny leather bag) that contains the hair of Nana and other dead ancestors, and will keep those migrating to the mainland safe. Dash 150-151.

[504] Dash 163.

[505] Dash 150.

[506] Dash 159.

[507] Dash 159.

[508] Dash 160.

[509] W.E.B.Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Signet, 1969) 45.

[510] Farah Jasmine Griffin provides insightful observation on African American women's community and artistry in Julie Dash's film Daughters of the Dust. Griffin 179-183.

[511] Paul Riceour, Time and Narrative,Volume I, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 65.

[512] See Paul Gilroy's discussion of roots and routes as tropes for understanding culture and identity. Paul Gilroy, Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). For a similar discussion also see: James Clifford, Roots: Travel and Transatlantic in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[513] Dash 115.

[514] Pam Cook and Philip Dodd, eds., "Julie Dash: Daughters of the Dust and a Black Aesthetic" Film: A Sight and Sound Reader (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) 224-231.

[515] For an example of such images see Kasi Lemmons film Eve's Bayou where most if not all of the African American women have some straightened (via chemical or hot iron comb), naturally curly red hair/black hair.

[516] See Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, ed. Russell Ferguson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) 247-65.

[517] See Paulette M. Caldwell, "Hair Piece," Critical Race Theory, ed. Richard Delgado (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) 268.

[518] Miramax Press Representative: Donna Daniels 1992, 1-4.

[519] In a scene where Chantel is politely standing in as the store manager encounters a white woman that condescends and questions Chantel's responsibility, intellect, and taste. Chantel's slings her braids and talks back to the woman after repeatedly being insulted.

[520] Gray Herman, Watching Race: Television and the Struggles for "Blackness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 152-153.

[521] See Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986)14.

[522] Dialogue from the film "The Watermelon Woman."

[523] In "The Watermelon Woman" the protagonist and the filmmaker share the same first names.

[524] The black lesbian body was suppressed in popular culture until 1982. However, in 1982, then Vanessa Williams (the first Miss Black America) was dethroned because of lesbian photographs published in Penthouse according to Deborah Willis and Carla Williams. See Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, The Black Female Body: A Photographic History (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002)115.

[525]Mark Winkour, "Body and Soul: Identifying (with) the Black Lesbian Body, in Cheryl Dunye's Watermelon Woman," Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women, ed. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 235.

[526] Ed Guerro, Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) 174-175.

[527] Winkour 237.

[528] In the essay "Of Mimicry and Man" Homi Bhabaha argues that under the colonial structure (in the U.S. racism/ and other oppressive forces) nonwhites, or others, are expected to mimic (an improbable endeavor) whiteness. He writes: "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite...Almost the same but not white." See Homi Bhabaha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994) 86-89.

[529] McKinney was the lead actress in the 1929 all African American cast film "Hallelujah!" about the trials and tribulations of African American sharecroppers, directed by King Vidor. This film was one a select group of African American films produced by a major studio (MGM).

[530] A butch lesbian is a woman that/whose appearance is a copy of the copy of the heterosexual male performance of masculinity. A femme lesbian is a woman that/whose

appearance is a copy of a copy of the heterosexual female performance of femininity. See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990) 156-58.

[531]Throughout the film Cheryl transgresses societal identity classifications and boundaries by performing openly as a lesbian woman (with her butch clothing, mannerism, near bald hair cut, and closeness with her lover). Here, I am utilizing Elizabeth Wilson's definition of transgression. Wilson asserts that in order to perform our identities, showing that we exist, we all transgress to place distance between ourselves and the dominant culture. See Joseph Bristow and Angelia. R. Wilson, eds., "Is Transgression Transgressive?" Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993)107-117. Finally, Cheryl's transgressive identity performance as a 'butch' lesbian exposes how inauthentic heterosexual gender roles/performances are. See Judith Butler "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Inside/Out: Lesbian Theory, Gay Theory, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991) 13-31.

[532] This incident with the police demonstrates that some lesbians run the risk of encountering literal and symbolic danger if their identity performances are outside the assigned ones of heterosexual women in a phallocentric society. See Paulina Palmer, Lesbian Gothic: Trangressive Fictions (New York: Cassell, 1999) 82.

[533] Anne Balsamo, Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 43.

[534] Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Theories of Representation and Difference) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 19.

[535] John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, Ethnography and the Historical Imagination (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) 40.

[536]Davis contends in the essay that a common observations by many individuals have reduced her activism and intellectualism to one component of her identity—her Afro. While Davis then identity as a black nationalist was important she has done more work in helping to shed light on those oppressed in the world because of race, gender, class, and sexuality."Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia," Tenderheaded: A Comb-Bending Collection of Hair Stories, ed. Juliette Harris and Pamela Johnson (New York: Pocket Books, 2001) Harris and Johnson 200-208.

[537] See Carol Guess, "Que(e)rying Lesbian Identity," The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association (Spring 1995): 19.

[538] In the film "The Watermelon Woman" Cheryl asserts: "The Watermelon Woman came from a real lack of any information about lesbian and film history of African American women…Since it wasn't happening, I invented it."

[539] See Robin D.G. Kelley, "Naptime: Historicizing the Afro." Fashion Theory I, No. 4 (1997): 339-351.

[540] I am borrowing here from Bressler's assertion that language itself is reflexive, not mimetic, and finding meaning in a text is a never ending process. In this case, the text to be read here is a film. See Charles E. Bressler, Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999) 132.

[541] Geneva Smitherman, Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986) 150.

[542] See Jewelle Gomez, "Showing Our Faces: A Century of Black Women Photographers," In a Different Light: Visual Cultrue, Sexual Identity, and Queer Practice, eds., Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, Amy Scholder (San Fransico: City Lights Books, 1997).

[543] See Nochlin asserts that white and black bodies (clothed or naked) signify lesbianism. Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," Art in America (May 1983):126.

For a discussion of asexual mammies see for example, Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films (Continum New York 1994) 14.

[544] Susan Brownmiller, Femininity (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984)75.

[545] See Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, Gender, Body, and Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 25.

[546]Bogle 112-114.

[547] For Foucault nothing is more material, physical, and corporal than the exercise of power. See Michel Foucault Power /Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books 1980) 7-58.

[548] Brownmiller 33.

[549] Patricia Hill Collins that lesbian sexuality in films like "Daughters of the Dust," is suggested but not seen. See Patricia Hill Collins, Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism, African American (New York: Routeldge, 2004) 272.

[551] Robles Crawford, "A Cultural Account of Health Control, Release, and the Social Body," Issues in the Political Economy of Health Care, ed. McKinlay, J.B (New York: Tavistock, 1984) 60-103.

[552] Cheryl dedicates "The Watermelon Woman" to Bambara.

[553] Some women, particularly African American filmmakers use popular culture to criticize hegemonic authority. Foster 104.

[554] Gibson 184.

CHAPTER V

(RE)CONCEPTUALIZING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S HAIR AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

"I should have been lighter skinned and I should have had straighter hair."

> Popular culture, especially, is organised around the contradiction: the popular forces versus the power-bloc. This gives to the terrain of cultural struggle its own kind of specificity … Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle.[555]

Stuart Hall argues that popular culture can serve as a means for African Americans to examine the unequal playing fields of the powerful and the disenfranchised. Throughout the years African American women have used the rich and dynamic realm of African American popular culture (i.e., advertisements, art, comics, music, plays, prose, and television) to critique how their hair and identity has been (mis)represented. They have also used the realm of popular culture as the space to (re)think and (re)present their hair as a part of their identity performance.[556]

Indeed, the space of popular culture, African American women redress the role the ideology of whiteness has played in the externally imposed identity of African American women. For African American women, their bodies, and specifically their hair, function as visual and arbitrary constructs used to assign human worth and value in America.[557] Cultural critic bell hooks notes that "the first body issue that affects black female identity, even more so than color, is hair texture."[558] Interrogations of African American women's hair and identity politics are examined within the confines of popular culture, specifically prose, comics, photographs, magazine advertisements, television, and music. These modes of popular culture function as a means to allow African American women to

explore the historical appropriation, exploitation, control[559] of and ultimate (re)conceptualizing of hair as an aspect of African American women's identities. In this sense, popular culture serves as a site of confrontation, freedom, and peace from negative (mis)representations. On the agenda of resistance Zen practitioner Thich Nhat Hahn asserts:

> It is a resistance against all kinds of things that are like war...So perhaps, resistance means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted, and destroyed by the system. The purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly.[560]

The subject of resistance to the historical assault on the image and identity of African American women illuminates Graeme Turner's contention:

> Popular culture systemically produces events, attitudes, and modes of entertainment that break conventions and challenge their founding assumptions.[561]

Indeed, such an argument is made for the work of African American women who use popular culture as a means to "transform a people's consciousness and awareness of themselves and their historical situation."[562]

Some African American women have used prose to attempt to change the way they are seen. Acclaimed playwright and poet Ntozake Shange uses hair to celebrate African American women's identity and lives when she writes:

> "the roots of your hair / what turns back when we sweat, run, make love, dance, get afraid, get happy: the tell-tale sign of living."[563]

When Shange refers to African American women's straightened hair "turning back,"[564] she celebrates the uniqueness of their femininity[565] and illustrates the dynamic nature of African Americanness and identity. Of this fluidity of identity Stuart Hall asserts:

> The fact is "black" has never been just there either. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically.[566]

The dynamic nature that Hall writes about is evident in the various spaces ranging from the street corner to the theater where African Americans interrogate their identity.[567] I assert that Shange makes use of the space of theater to (re)consider the fluidity of African American identity politics and the relevance of hair. Shange does this by situating African American women at the center of her work. Such a decision demonstrates that African American women are complex and should not be identified solely through their labor and reproduction and that they are as dynamic as their white female forebearers in theater productions.[568] I contend that Shange's wants a dialogue between the theater world and their audience, all of which contributes to the (re)shaping of knowledge about African American women through her articulations.[569]

African American women have also used poetry to explore their hair and identity politics. Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "Sisters" pays homage to African American women who refuse to fall victim to externally defined standards of beauty.

I love you.
Because I love you.
Because you are erect.
Because you are also bent.
In season, stern, kind/
Crisp, soft-in season.
And you withhold.
And you extend.
And you Step out.
And you go back.
And you extend again.

Your eyes, loud-soft, with crying and with smiles,
Are older than a million years,

And they are young.
You reach, in season.
And All
below the rich rough time of your hair.
You have not bought Blondine.
You have not hailed the hot-comb recently.
You never worshipped Marilyn Monore.
You say: Farah's hair is hers.
You have not wanted to be white.
Nor have you testified to adoration of that state
With the advertisement of limitation
(never successful because the hot comb is laughing too).
But oh the rough dark Other music!
the Real.
the Right.
The natural Respect of Self and Seal!
Sisters!
Your hair is Celebration in the world!

I maintain that Brooks' subversive[570] celebration of African American women's natural hairstyles serves as carnivalesque[571] models for their beauty and femininity. Brooks' poem suggests a reclaiming of her body through the natural styling of her hair. In this sense, Brooks's poem reflects Judith Butler's theory on the individual repositioning or reiterating themselves in society beyond the norms:

> That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law.[572]

Butler continues:

> It seems crucial to resist the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations.[573]

Here, Butler illuminates Brooks' homage to African American women who wear their hair natural as a way of questioning and refuting the notion that such hair is ugly[574] since it does not mirror a white female aesthetic. This refutation is a challenge to the (mis)representation of African American women wearing natural hair as unattractive or odd.[575] Also, Brooks' works functions, as Butler demonstrates, as an example of how race and gender work in concert to oppress and how they need to be aware and work to liberate themselves from the constraints of white female aesthetic standards. At its core, Brooks' poetic encouragement of African American women to continue to respect, value, and understand their African features and ancestry is a mode of reiteration, a cultural nod to their forbearers. Brooks' work supports a rigid aesthetic separation from the white female normative beauty standard by promoting bodily boundaries that rebuke the practice of African American women straightening their hair. In this manner, natural hairstyles are both a performance of identity and also dissonance that should be welcomed and embraced.

Brooks understands first hand, as this poem indicates, that African Americans have been taught from with and outside the community that they are not beautiful or that their hair is problematic.[576] Armed with this understanding, Brooks envisions poetry thusly:

> "In writing poetry, you're interested in condensation. So you try to put all of a particular impression or inspiration on a page. You distill."[577]

Brooks's poetry is an inspiration for African American women who wear their hair natural when many African American women straighten their hair. It is my assertion that the use of the metaphor "distill" illuminates how hair politics is a part of many African American women's lived experience and performs an alternative identity that embraces their African features for the world to see.[578] Thus, these African American women

become a walking contradiction to racism and sexism by controlling how they will present themselves in the world. In this sense Brooks' feminist poem has a subtext that critiques internalized gendered racism. This poem echoes bell hooks' definition of feminism:

> To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels-----sex, race, and class to name a few---- and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.[579]

The feminist desire that hooks refers to highlights how identity is constructed though desire. Brooks desires African American women to refrain from straightening their hair in order to foster social acceptance.[580] She desires that they use their natural hairstyles as a reflection of an identity that persuades African American women to always be at odds with racist and sexist ideologies that hinder their intention to embrace their heritage. Brooks' work also demonstrates her understanding of the desire of some African American women to be self-conscious in their battle against the ideas (racism and sexism) that have long controlled how they perform their identity.

Ntozake Shange addresses the subject of African American women's hair and identity politics in a sketch entitled: "Being a White Girl for a Day" from her play *Spell #7*. Shange's character Lily describes her performance of whiteness thusly:

> today I'm gonna be a white girl
> I'll retroactively wake myself up
> an low & behold
> a white girl in my bed
> but first I'll have to call a white girl I know to have some more accurate information
> what's the first thing white girls think in the morning

do they get up being glad they aint niggahs
do they remember mama
or worry about getting to work
do they work? Do they play isadora & wrap themselves in sheets & go tip toeing to the kitchen to make maxwell house coffee
oh I know
the first thing a white girl does in the morning is fling[581] her hair[582]

Lily continues,

i'm gonna simply brush my hair.
rapunzel pull yr tresses back into the tower. & lady godiva give up horseback riding.
i'm gonna alter my social & professional life dramatically.
i will brush 100 strokes in the morning/ 100 strokes midday & 100 strokes before retiring. i will have a very busy schedule. between the local trains & the express/ i'm gonna brush.
i brush between telephone calls.
at the disco i'm brush on the slow songs/ i dont slow dance with strangers.
i'ma brush my hair before making love & after.
i'll brush my hair in taxis. while windowshopping. when I have visitors over the kitchen table/ i'ma brush.
i brush my hair while thinking abt anything.
mostly i think abt how it will be when i get my full heada hair.
like lifting my head in the morning will become a chore.
i'll try to turn my cheek & my hair will weigh me down...[583]

It is my assertion that Shange is using long hair as a signifier of white race pride and privilege. This is reflected in Lily's observations that she is glad to awaken to her day of leisure as a white woman. Here Lily interrogates the complexities of gender as she considers fairytale characters and mythic women in history whose hair has helped free them or others from restrictive forces.[584] Lily's new hair transforms her "social and professional life." As it grows, however, the hair weighs her down. Performing her own identity entails lifting the weight of patriarchy off her mind and body, thus redefining herself and challenging male classification of her as Other.[585] Shange's sketch acknowledges the role of woman's identity, while suggesting that women control their

identity performance and determine their own self worth. I maintain that in this sense, the poem ends on a hopeful note by alluding to the fact that patriarchy is seen as a burden that contemporary women do not have to endure.

Playwright and poet Pearl Cleage also interrogates the poetics and identity politics of African American women's hair in her satirical performance piece "Hairpeace." Cleage considers that all African American women writers feel the need to write about hair and opines that the "licensing board" that gives them permission to write might revoke their licenses if they do not tell at least ten hair stories. [586] Cleage then tells her own hair stories, showing how hair has helped shaped her identity as early as childhood.

> There was the evening when my mother fluffed my four-year-old natural around my head like a golden crown and led me innocently in to bask in the anticipated delight and affection of my father. When my father looked up from his desk to find me grinning in the doorway, he masked his irritation with a quick smile. "Look at your beautiful daughter," said my mother, pushing me into the room. My father patted my shoulder gently, his eyes flickering over my hair, a longer, lighter replica in an un-Murrayed state. He said, "It's not quite long enough for her to wear it down yet, is it?" Now I was only four, but I was old enough to know that "not quite long enough' was a polite way of saying "not quite good enough", as in the phrase *she got the good stuff*, when applied to hair. Good in this context needed no qualifiers. Good could stand alone. We all knew what it meant and we were humble, especially since "good hair" often occurred along with other oppressed-community-defined qualities of beauty, such as lighter-toned skin, sharper features, and every now and then, the wonder of light eyes.[587]

Cleage, like many African American girls, initially learns what is valuable about the appearance of her body from her family. [588]Her mother sends the message that her hair is beautiful; her father's eyes and fake smile, however, send a different message. Instead, Cleage's father pats her shoulder as if consoling her for not having long and "good" hair. Ironically, Cleage's father Albert (Aka Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman) was a minister and

Christian Black Nationalist, who was familiar with[589] the long history of some individuals of African descent feeling inadequate about their hair and should have anticipated the effect of his response on his daughter. It is my contention that Albert Cleage effectively placed a ceiling on his daughter's identity, self-worth, and image.[590] His actions illustrate the complexity of internazlied gendered racism, and his concern over the shortness of his daughter's hair reflects sexist stereotypical notions about femininity. [591]

Poet and activist June Jordan also questions race and stereotypical notions of femininity in her polemic piece "Poem about My Rights":

> Even tonight and I need to take a walk and clear my head about this poem about why I can't go out without changing my clothes my shoes my body posture my gender identity my age my status as a woman alone in the evening/alone on the streets/alone not being the point/the point being I can't do what I want to do with my own body because I am the wrong sex the wrong age the wrong skin...it was my father saying I was wrong saying that I should have been a boy because he wanted one/a boy and that I should have been lighter skinned and that I should have had straighter hair and that I should not be so boy crazy but instead I should just be one/a boy and before that it was my mother pleading plastic surgery for my nose and braces for my teeth and telling me to let the books loose to let them loose in other words. [592]

Like Cleage, Jordan gets clues from her father about how unacceptable her hair and body are, further illustrating the politics of appearance, racism, sexism, and self loathing that is present among many African Americans. Jordan's poem is not an indictment of her father; rather, it serves as an indictment of a world that has dubbed her performance as an African American woman as "wrong." Early in Jordan's life her sense of identity is figured by gender (female), color (not light enough), and her hair (not straight), all of which she responds to by her transgression: her unstraightened hair is both a rejection and celebration of gender and racial differences. That is to say, Jordan rejects the assumptions

of the notions of "feminine" female aesthetic and identity that society would inscribe on her body and have her perform. Conversely, Jordan's embracing of her hair affords her the opportunity to celebrate and perform as she chooses. Her transgressive performance for books over boys does not perform what is thought to be appropriate behavior for a "classically defined woman,"[593] i.e. behavior signifying "self-abnegation" or "idealization of marriage and motherhood." Similarly, when Jordan grows up and maintains her nappy hair, leaves her marriage, and builds a career as a single mother, she is not performing as a "classically defined woman" or "good," because a good woman would stay married, subvert her career aspirations for motherhood, and ostensibly straighten her hair. Jordan uses her hair, body, race, gender, and age to interrogate and expose these characteristics as signifiers of repressive systems active in her daily lived experiences.[594] Jordan, Shange, Brooks, and Cleage show how African American women used popular culture to contest how they have been historically and contemporaneously devalued.

Comics

Many cultural critics writing in the 1950s suggest that comics (along with other types of popular media) are frivolous and have the potential to stunt social and intellectual development. [595] George Orwell's declaration that comics are "pernicious rubbish" that "have almost no aesthetic interest" is typical of this group.[596] Expressions of this viewpoint began to wane by the 1970s and 1980s as distinctions between "high" and "low" culture became blurred.[597] Literary critic Mikta Brottman argues:

> However, it is not necessarily the lower socioeconomic groups that demand and consume popular culture, a fact that has been ratified by numerous surveys revealing cross-class consumptions figures for magazines, tabloids, and comic books, and demographically diverse

> viewing figures for soap operas, chat shows, film, and popular fiction. These figures suggest that the relationship between popular culture and capitalism has always been, and remains, manifestly dynamic and contradictory.[598]

Brottman's observation suggests that comics are not ostensibly valueless in society. In fact, comics have become a venue for some African American women to work to subvert (mis)representations with (re)presentations that allow them to show the dynamic nature of African American women's identities.

In the foreword of Fredrik Stromberg's Black Images in Comics: A Visual History,[599] Dr. Charles Johnson asserts that 200 years of negative cartoon images of African Americans have had a lasting negative effect on the construction of African American identity. Johnson's provocative statement about the transmitted messages these cartoons have is understandable when considering, for example, that most offensive comic depictions of African Americans were created by whites. For example, white cartoonist Frank O King produced (mis)representations of African American women in his 1918 comic strip "Gasoline Alley." The comic focuses on the marriage of newlyweds Walt Wallet and his bride Phyllis, and the tension between them and Rachel, the maid. Phyllis is always drawn as "pretty as a picture," [600] in contrast; Rachel was always drawn in an image of the stereotypical "Mammy."[601] Rachel appears clownish and manly. Her covered hair further defeminizes her appearance.

The 1925 Otto Messmer comic strip, "Felix the Cat" also includes a clownish looking Mammy whose appearance and behavior approximates that of Harriet Beecher Stowe's character Topsy,[602] a slave child. Stowe describes Topsy as follows:

> "She was one of the blackest of her race; and her round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth, half open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas'r's parlor, displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her woolly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning, over which was oddly drawn, like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity. She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging; and stood with her hands demurely folded before her. Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance,—something, as Miss Ophelia afterwards said, "so heathenish..."[603]

I contend that the description of Topsy's hair as wooly and wayward is a metaphor for her behavior, described by St. Clare (Uncle Tom's third owner) as follows:

> "Come here, Tops you monkey! said St. Clare, calling the child up to him. Topsy came up; her round, hard eyes glittering and blinking with a mixture of apprehensiveness and their usual odd drollery. "What makes you behave so?" said St. Clare, who could not help being amused by the child's expression. "Spects it's my wicked heart," said Topsy, demurely; "Miss Freely says so."[604]

Here, I maintain that Messmer's servile character echoes both Topsy's unruly hair and her clownish appearance and thought. For instance, at one point she hands Felix a roasted rooster, announcing: "Yo Sho Am Good Luck Felix—Hyah's Yo Rooster-Ah's Got Wot Ah Wants!!!" This caption reinforces long held notions about African Americans being stupid along with the negative (mis)representations of hair and the other exaggerated features that degrade African American women.

Regrettably, some African Americans also contributed to these negative comic images. One example is found in "Musical Mose" by interracial cartoonist George Herriman. Mose is a poverty stricken musician that earns money by performing at ethnic events.[605] In this specific cartoon, he is shown with an African American woman. Both Mose and the woman have dark skin and exaggerated unattractive features that render them clown

like. The young woman wears a hat from under which some of her coarse hair peeks out. Such negative (mis)representations of African Americans illuminate the complexity of self loathing among people of color like Herriman, himself, whose kinky hair thwarted his efforts to pass.[606] Moreover, Herriman's image (re)inscribes the carnivalesque on the African American body as discussed by Rosemarie Garland Thomson:

> ... the body that refuses to be normalized. The cultural logic of euthanasia is thus directed against what is often unproblematically seen as the unfit body—the body that does not meet certain aesthetic, formal, or functional expectations, the body that flies in the face of the sacred cultural ideologies of progress, self-determination, improvement, reform, and perfectibility—in other words, the very essence of what we take to be American.[607]

Thomson's discourse recalls that the hair, body, and identity of (non-disabled) white women are the cultural and aesthetic epitome of perfection. African American women who can not approximate white women are "cast as deviant and inferior."[608] Herriman himself feels inferior, and his work "casting" African Americans as "inferior" underscores that fine point.

Later images of African American women are positively influenced by Zelda "Jackie" Ormes, the only African American woman to have a syndicated comic strip in African American newspapers until her retirement in the late 1960s. Printing in African American newspapers gives Ormes the freedom to place African American females at the center of her strip as she does in 1937 with "Torchy Brown in Dixie to Harlem."[609] Torchy Brown is a beautiful African American woman with short straight hair who challenged issues of bigotry and sexism. Prior to Ormes' contribution to comics, the roles of women are restricted to admiring the male hero, dangling from ledges, or screaming for help.[610]

Torchy challenges the disfigured images of African American women produced in comics like those of King, Messmer, and Harriman. These dynamic images offer her audiences (re)presentations of African American women that are rooted in demonstrating attractive, empowered women. These images illustrate the possibilities of an authentic African American female subject[611] and produce an alternative discourse of African American womanhood.[612] This alternative discourse, in comic form, offers to their audience the distinctive message that these women have their own hair and beauty aesthetics and they endure, at minimum, triple oppression of gender, race and class in their lives. In this manner, Ormes' contribution to comics is transgressive because her female characters do not conform to the white female normative standard of beauty. [613]

In 1946 Ormes uses characters from her second strip "Patty Jo 'n' Ginger" to subtly critique racism and sexism and to encourage voter participation for African Americans. Like Torchy, Patty Jo (an outspoken young child) and Ginger (her silent teenage sister) are transgressive spectacles because they are non-white, their appearances do not resemble the (mis)representations produced primarily by the dominant culture, and they are not "quiet and discreet."[614] Patty Jo is particularly unusual, considering that African American girls of the period are usually (mis)represented as wild haired, dirty, silly "pickannies." Patty Jo's image is the exact opposite, and, instead, invokes grotesque imagery. That is to say, Patty Jo's combed hair, clean body, fashionable clothing, and astute observations echo Teresa de Lauretis' contention that such aesthetics destabilize and reject normalizing images (e.g., the white female normative aesthetic) to redesign women's roles and identities in the universe.[615] Here, Patty Jo's destabilizing image allows Ormes to call to her audience's attention how African American females are

expected to perform within the confines of racism and patriarchy. From the appearance and speech of Patty Jo, Ormes seems to want the audience to know that African Americans are intelligent, conscious, dynamic, and attractive human beings.

Despite observations like Lincoln and Ormes' success, some comics still contained (mis)representations of African American women by the time of her retirement. Robert Crumb, a white cartoonist known for his biting satire and sexual tones, and racial stereotypes mocks African American women[616] in his 1968 comic strip "Angelfood McSpade." The strip includes a bald African American woman with exaggerated features and a long lascivious tongue. Neither the woman's image nor her implied hypersexuality bear any resemblance to an actual African American woman. Like previous strips, "Angelfood McSpade" makes a negative contribution to how the "text"[617](i.e., body, hair, and overall identity) of the African American women is interpreted within the parameters of popular culture. Such negative images were further undermined on January 18, 1970, when white writer Jim Lawrence and Spaniard illustrator Jorge Longaron premiered "Friday Foster," a comic strip about an African American fashion photographer and former model.[618] Although "Friday Foster" would only run for four years, it would help change the way African American women were (re)presented in comic strips.[619] The articulation of Friday's aesthetic style (specifically, her long, straight hair) stands out. Stuart Hall defines articulation as:

> the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? How do discourses link with other social forces? How do different elements come to be fixed together to form a discourse? How did these ideas come to be articulated at specific times to certain political subjects?[620]

This articulation allows the comic strip to act as a mode of presenting new identities—and offering new meaning to the images of African American women. Furthermore, Friday's hair in the comic strip becomes an articulation of an ideological struggle to subvert the long notion within popular culture that African American women are unattractive and marked by labor and reproduction.[621] Friday Foster's stylish clothing, African facial features, and her long straight hair come together to form a discourse that articulates to their audience that Friday, like other African American women is feminine and beautiful---just like natural hair.

The forward thinking of Ormes, Lawrence, and Lugarno highlight new identities for some African American women and altered the way they were (re)presented in comics. This performance of identities through various hairstyles and aesthetic qualities was further extended by Barbara Brandon (1958--), who introduces comic strip "Where I'm Coming From" in The Detroit Free Press in 1981. The strip is later acquired by Universal Press Syndicate in 1991 for national syndication.[622] Brandon's characters include nine single African American women in their 20s and 30s (Alisha, Cheryl, Jackie, Judy, Lekesia, Lydia, Monica, Nicole, and Sonya) who wear a variety of hairstyles, including the Afro, twist, dreadlocks, permanents, and braids. The characters criticize contemporary social mores, cultural trends, and political issues. [623] Recurring issues in Brandon's strip include hair and identity politics.[624] One example is where Brandon depicts a light skinned African American woman with "good hair"[625] pointing to the sexual exploitation of enslaved African women that ultimately produced such skin and hair. Brandon wants her audience to think critically about the value placed on hair and facial features that resemble those of whites who oppressed African American women.

Brandon also wants her audience to consider how the dubious currency assigned to "good hair" and other non-African facial features ultimately denigrates African American identity and self-image,[626] and maintains a system of oppression. Like Jesse Fauset and Nella Larsen before her, Brandon is trying to demonstrate how arbitrary racial categories are.

Brandon also uses the character Lekesia (who has long dreadlocks) to explore broader domestic and international political issues. Lekesia's locked hair signifies to some a certain religious and spiritual consciousness, and to others (like the Afro) a "militant" and "aggressive" consciousness and identity.[627] So, when Brandon wants to take a more forceful position and engage in more radical politics, she used Lekesia as a muse/mouth piece. Brandon uses her comic strip as a space to encourage her audience to contemplate how African American women hair and bodies are politicized, and to (re)consider topical political issues.[628] She describes the goal of her strip in *Ebony* magazine interview:

> "I'm not trying to get people to double over in laughter or slap their knees. "I just want them to say, 'I can relate to that. I understand what she is talking about."[629]

Like Ormes, Brandon's subversive comics provide a venue from which to (re)consider, challenge, and politicize issues that some African American women find valuable in their lives.

Silhouettes (Illustrations)

Kara Walker is a modern artist and professor who uses innovative exhibits of silhouettes to (re)conceptualize and controversially parody[630] African American women's racial and gender identity in America. Utilizing the landscape of popular culture, Walker's black and white silhouettes prompt her audience to reflect on the sexual and racial experiences

of African Americans and their relationships with whites during the antebellum era. Her 1998 silhouette, *Pastoral*, shows a squatting African American woman while a sheep rests on her head holding a sling blade. Here, Walker (re)visits some whites' attempts to make the enslaved Africans believe that they had wool on their heads instead of hair, thus linking their hair, bodies, and behavior with that of animals.[631] Walker's images allow her audience to consider several subtle, conflicting interpretations of such images.[632] For example, the woman's sling blade might be the means to cut (literally and figuratively) the racist and sexist ideology that has been inscribed on her body and hair and see herself anew. In this way, the woman prepares to liberate herself from oppressive notions and start anew. Another interpretation is that this woman believes that her hair is like "wool" and does embody animalistic qualities, and therefore decides to cut off her hair and be bald rather than endure "wool" hair any longer. Additionally, by invoking the sheep Walker (re)inscribes the notion that African American women's sexuality is animalistic and problematic, and so holds the sling blade in preparation to end her hypersexual and plague filled existence. Or, the black sheep on her head could be construed as illustrating how African American women are the 'black sheep'[633] of society. Finally, the image of the sheep defecating may suggest that the racist and sexist ideology that has troubled African American women is feces applied to them by a racist and sexist society. Regardless of how one decides to style it, there is no such thing as politically correct hair (chemical or non chemical).

In another exhibited silhouette entitled "Presenting Negro Scenes Drawn Upon My Passage Through the South and Reconfigured for the Benefit of Enlightened Audiences Wherever Such May Be Found," Walker has an African American woman holding the

severed head of her slave mistress over her head. Walker means to give the impression that the African American woman has cut off the white woman head. She holds the head of the white woman above hers as if it were a spoil of war. I argue that a more complex interpretation of Walker's silhouette suggest that the African American woman holds above her own head the head of the woman whose hair and beauty she is supposed to emulate. Since the African American woman knows she can never fully emulate the white woman's hair texture or beauty, she breaks with reality and literally embracing whiteness as the standard. In this way, the African American woman acquires some of the white woman's aesthetic currency, value as a woman, and power. Finally, Walker's silhouettes demonstrate a need for the enslaved to redress their situation and bodies. Walker's work is an example of a visual redress, an expression of loss and desire to find pleasure and remedy for how enslaved Africans, and ultimately contemporary African American women, have been (mis)represented and (mis)treated.[634]

Photographs

Photographs, like other modes of popular culture, assist some African American women in using their hair to articulate both the configuration of their difference and their identity, thus removing themselves from the margins of history and situating themselves at the center as subjects.[635] In her eponymous collection of photographs, Lorna Simpson's work is examined by Deborah Willis, who demonstrates Simpson's use of African American women's bodies and hair to (re)present a narrative about African American women in America that reflects the replacement of invisibility with a meticulously regulated, segregated visibility.[636] Indeed, the recurring question posed by

Simpson's photographs is "Who is visible?"[637] Simpson's "Stereo Styles" (like 'stereotypes') presents a collection of photographs of hairstyles ranging from wild and loose to a neatly styled chignon. However, it is Simpson's modern take on the stereotypical image of a pickaninny and the words in the middle of the photographs ("daring, sensible, severe, long and silky, boyish, ageless, silly, magnetic, country fresh, and sweet") that stand out among the carefully arranged photographs. The images, the words, and the title of the piece might be construed as "severe," leaving the audience to contemplate how such "styles" affected how African American women see themselves in the world. Such (mis)representations like the pickaninny are "silly" and do not begin to reflect the African American woman's subjectivity. The fact that the audience only sees the back of the woman's head is an indication that such "styles" do not allow those from the outside the African American community to know who the woman is. While Simpson uses her photographs to give African American women visibility, it is limited visibility.

In another series entitled, "Twenty Questions," a sample of Simpson's photographs reveal the back of an African American woman's head with the caption:

> "Is she as pretty as a picture, Or Clear as Crystal, Or Pure as a Lilly, Or Black as Coal, Or Sharp as a Razor."[638]

In this way, Simpson asks her audience to look at the hair of the woman and try to come to a conclusion about her identity—make judgments about this African American woman— and that of African American women as a whole. Simpson's images and questions reframe the complex and contradictory aesthetics that have historically been inscribed on African American women's hair and how they now reformulate their identity politics. Finally, in the piece "Flipside," Simpson pays tribute to and comments on her mother's experience of wearing a short Afro and her neighbor's suspicions of her

new hairstyle during the sixties.[639] The image of the Afro and the mask conjures up several readings. Coco Fusco reads Simpson's photograph thusly:

> Ambiguity and juxtaposition of elements here enables us to tease out several possible interpretations. The woman's naturally kinky hair might in some contexts connote rebelliousness, or pose a threat simply as a sign of blackness. But Simpson will not allow us to take any connection between hairstyle and blackness for granted. Ironically, the African mask is shaped in a manner reminiscent of Euro-American flip hairdos of the sixties, which became a trademark style of many black women entertainers of that period. The masks, a symbol for many Africa and African aesthetics, is here recoded to also recall a European hairstyle appropriated by black women. Finally, that an African mask could suggest straightened hair puts into question any essentialist interpretation of its identity. [Simpson] is less interested in passing judgement on black representation or in rejecting negative images and stereotypes than she is in exploring potential by reformulating them.[640]

Another symbolic reading of Simpson's "Flipside" posits the mask as a signifier for a slave ship of the middle passage. The opening of the mask resembles the belly of the slave ship. The slave ship and the Afro are reminders of Simpson's mother's African heritage.

I contend that like Simpson, Renee Cox is another African American female photographer who uses African American women's hair as part of her canvas when (re) thinking African American female identity.[641] In her series "Yo Mama", Cox uses her own body to comment on issues such as history, womanhood, identity, and religion from the perspective of contemporary African American women. For instance, one photograph, Cox, wearing only high-heeled pumps, stares defiantly into the camera while holding her son. Her "natural" dreadlocked hair and nude body defy white female normative beauty standards, allowing her to "absolutely tell the truth"[642]and (re)situate her identity in multiple roles as professional working mother. This image refuses to be confined by racism and sexism[643] and inverts the old notion that African American

female identity is connected solely to labor and reproduction. Cox's photographs reveal a desire to (re)define and perform as an autonomous identity. The inclusion of high heeled pumps with her naked body reveal an identity that implies a desire that has her labor will associated with a professional career (rather than menial), providing her with agency. The children of such a woman will also be free from exploitation from the dominant culture. In other words, she is unwilling to hide anything about who she is, and is prepared to claim her power in the world regardless of racism and sexism.[644] The verisimilitude in Cox's image does not permit others to construct her identity. Cultural critic bell hooks concurs:

> One of the most significant forms of power held by the weak is the refusal to accept the definition of oneself that is put forward by the powerful.[645]

Indeed, in terms of identity construction, Cox's constructed image is startlingly different from that of the African woman in another photograph who appears much more passive in stance and demeanor. This woman's head is lowered, such that her eyes do not make contact with the camera. Also, her natural hair has a ribbon which, when combined with her earrings and necklace, reframe her head to make her head and hair appear more feminine. Also, unlike Cox, this woman is removing some clothing[646] and seems to be preparing to offer herself to the individual gazing upon her body. Cox's image does not convey an offering of sexual favors; instead, she has the appearance of a woman who is saying with her defiant look that she will not be exploited sexually (or in any other manner). This message is illuminated by her dreadlocks, which for many serve as a symbol for militancy.[647] Indeed, Cox's hair, posture, and the way she boldly meets the camera's gaze subverts the docile, sexualized image of the figure in the other photograph. Cox's image says that she is more than a sexual object; she is a conscious African

American woman that is in control of her body, identity, and sexuality, as well as the way they are (re)viewed.

Cox's Renaissance series offers a piece entitled "*Pieta*" that echoes Michelangelo's famous work. Here, Cox focuses less on the sexual aspect of African American female identity and places emphasis on the aspect of African American women's religious identity. Cox's subject is the Virgin Mary holding Jesus after the crucifixion. As she holds Jesus we see her that she is mourning and her dreadlocks peek out slightly from her covering. Cox, an African American artist, shows the dreadlocks[648] to allow for a link between people of African heritage and the prophet—Jesus. This works as a counternarrative to the images in popular culture that associate dreadlocks with drug dealers and criminals.[649] By showing the Virgin Mary with dreadlocks, Cox (re)marks on the race of Jesus, thereby subverting the religious and racial ideology ritual[650] that situates Jesus as white in words and images, and identifies Jesus as belonging to the people of African descendent. Cox also uses her dreadlocks and dark skin to conflate racist and sexist ideology that has been inscribed on the African American female body by (re)marking African American women as women who hold prominent roles in the gospel--as holy women.

Photographer Cynthia Wiggins also addresses African American women's hair as it relates to beauty with her semi-autobiographical piece entitled "Don't Hate Me Because I'm Beautiful."[651] Wiggins presents herself, a dark skinned African American woman with full features and short crinkly coarse hair, as an example of how African American women can shift their performance of identity. In other words, Wiggins inverts the idea that African American women have no aesthetic currency by (re)inscribing a phrase

associated with beautiful white women onto the African American body and consciousness. By invoking the words, Wiggins implies that the actual process of altering African Americans hair is not necessary.

Magazine Advertisements

Advertising for hair care products has helped numerous American companies, mostly female (eventually male) and white owned, to become wealthy.[652] Advertising also functions as a cultural mode of representation, an indicator of society's ideology and values—values which affect the way African Americans are seen and treated. As in other media, (mis)representations of African American women in advertising have been widespread. In particular, advertisers have exploited prejudices about hair and color of African Americans in order to sell hair and beauty products.[653]

One of the first advertisements directed at the African American consumer was published on September 28, 1828 in The Freedman's Journal, the first African American newspaper. [654] There, Peter Lewis announced that he was opening a dressing room for people of color to have their hair cut and to receive a shave.[655] The journal also publicized the disappearance of eleven year old Eliza Pisco, who was described as having a scar in her hair.[656] It was suggested that Pisco might have been abducted and sold south into slavery.[657] These types of notices, along with advertisements selling other goods, services, and rooms for rent, appear as staples of the Freedman's Journal. Newspapers like the Freedman's Journal also sold spaces in their publications to advertisers (typically white and male) whose ads lured African American women with the promise of

enhancing their beauty with African American products.[658] Mainstream publications also ran such ads. For instance, presents an 1867 issue of Harper's Bazaar, presented an advertisement for hair dressing in which the women depicted are all white and have luxurious long piles of fashionably styled hair. In addition to reinforcing a normative standard, these women serve as evidence of the magazine's self-description as a "repository of fashion, pleasure, and instruction."[659] One could find blatant advertisements for Crane and Company's bleaching cream and hair straightener in1901---an advertisement that African American women's skin and hair are problems that need to be fixed, and this produet's ability to do so for those with desire and a dollar. Such ads as this[660]offer little doubt that white women are the examples that African American women (among others) should embrace if they want to improve their appearance.

Towards the end of the 19th century, two African American business women would make use of such advertising to help their companies become incredibly successful: Annie T. Malone and Madam C.J. Walker. Annie Turnbo Malone was born on August 9, 1869 in Metropolis Illinois as the tenth of eleven children of Robert and Isabella Cook Turnbo. Both parents died suddenly, leaving Malone to live with her older sister.[661] As a student, Malone excelled in chemistry and later used her knowledge to produce several hair care products for African American women's hair, including "Wonderful Hair Grower Shampoo."[662] Malone is also credited with creating what is arguably the first straightening comb (known as "pullers") in 1900. Unfortunately, her "pullers" caused African American women's hair to be oddly limped.[663]

While Malone's "pullers" were not successful, selling her hair care products door to door was very successful.[664] In 1900 Malone opened a small factory called Poro in Lovejoy[665]

Illinois, where she manufactured her hair care products, provided alternative employment for African Americans, and was so successful as to be able to make civic contributions throughout the African American community. It has been suggested that she added the name Poro as a marketing ploy to link her company with Africa.[666] And, indeed, one finds upon viewing certain Malone advertisements that they do link African American women's hair more with Africa than Europe. The advertisement suggests that women of African descent have a long history of caring for and styling their hair in beauty forms that resembled art.[667] Malone's advertisements sent the ultimate message that this African heritage, artistry, and beauty could be replicated by using her products.[668]

Malone eventually became one of the most significant African American business women to advertise her hair and beauty products in newspapers.[669] Her advertisements placed both dark-skinned and light skinned African American women as the centers of beauty. Malone also placed recruiting advertisements that highlighted career opportunities for African American women. These advertisements served African American women in two ways: first, by promoting hair and beauty products that increased self-esteem in some women, and second, by offering a chance for African American women to take control of their lives and work towards economic independence. These ads challenged critics of Malone who said she was merely exploiting African American women's low self esteem and advocating assimilation.[670]

Madam C. J. Walker (nee Sarah Breedlove), a former employee[671] and competitor of Malone, was also influential in changing the way African American women were (re)presented in advertising. Sarah Breedlove was born in Delta, Louisiana in 1867 to

Owen and Minerva Breedlove. Sarah and her siblings Louvenia and Alex were orphaned when their parents died from yellow fever in 1874.[672] While living with her sibling, Sarah met and married Moses McWilliams in 1882, gave birth to a daughter Lelia, and became a widow by the age of twenty. To support her daughter, she moved north to St. Louis to work as a washerwoman. In 1904, she became a trainee at the Poro Company, where she was exposed to both Malone's products and business approach.[673] In 1905, Walker began to sell her own version of "Wonderful Hair Grower"[674] door to door. Malone later alleged that Walker stole her (unpatented) formulas while working at her company. Darlene Clark Hine offers this instance as an example of Malone's poor business acumen.[675] Walker moved to Denver, Colorado in 1906, where she met and later married newspaper man Charles J. Walker,[676] who (like Malone's husband) helped her shape her business. In fact, it was Charles J. Walker who helped Walker begin her famous "Before and After" advertising campaign in African American periodicals and mail orders.[677] Walker's image of her own long, straight, healthy looking hair was evidence that her products could alter African American women's hair. It was the ultimate testimony of a product that cost less than a dollar and also claimed to help with African American women's skin concerns. Walker's image on the product also sent the subliminal message to her patrons that she would be accountable to customers.[678] Walker later enlisted agents to sell her products as she initially did at the Poro Company.[679]

A later advertisement[680] touts the domestic and international fame (as implied by the use of maps) and success of Walker's image and products. The phrase "We Belt the World" and the highlighted presence of Walker's products in South America (in particular, Brazil, a country with a strong African influence) also connote an element of Pan-African

pride. Fine print in the box at the bottom of the ad hints of a "Great Opportunity for Agents" and encourages the reader to "Write for Terms." Walker's revolutionary advertisement encourages African American women by offering them a chance to gain economic independence. A similar opportunity is offered in another of Walker's ads:

> "A real Opportunity for Women who wish to Become Independent. Mme. Walker's System of Scientific Scalp Treament and Sales of her Hair preparations are giving support to more than 100, 000 people in this industry. Come in and learn how."[681]

Although Malone and Walker's products helped African American women straighten their hair,[682] their advertisements reflect a counterhegemonic narrative that critiques ideologies of race, gender, and class in both the dominant and middle class African American culture.[683] Through Walker's and Malone's hair care businesses, other African American women could dare to alter their appearance and social standing, thus feeling better about their identity and the way they lived.

The influence of these early pioneers' advertising efforts can be seen in the hair care / beauty businesses of women who followed them, most notably Sara Spencer Washington (1889-1953) and Rose Morgan (1912-). In 1918, while living in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Washington established the Apex beauty system. She cared for African American women's hair in her salon, opened and operated beauty schools, and sold wigs and hair pieces.[684] In 1929, she began distributing "Apex News," a newsletter containing beauty tips, social and political news about notable African Americans, and information about her products.[685] These newsletters foreshadowed future publications for African American women (e.g., *Essence* magazine). Washington became a successful

businesswoman and philanthropist whose beauty schools continued to operate long after Walker's schools had closed.[686]

Like Malone and Walker, Rose Morgan overcame a limited educational background to become a successful hair care magnate. Rose Morgan rented a booth in a hair salon in New York City and she styled Ethel Waters's hair. In 1939 Morgan opened her first salon and in 1955 launched the hugely successful Rose Meta House of Beauty in Harlem. She sold her own line of cosmetics, hair care products and services throughout America, Africa, and the Caribbean. Morgan's hair care products and skills attracted celebrity clients such as Katherine Dunham and Lena Horne, and enabled her to secure counter space in large white owned stores such as that of W.T. Grant. [687] Like Walker, Morgan used her position as a thriving business woman to inform and uplift the race. For instance, while operating the largest hair salon in Harlem, Morgan made time to speak with others in the African American community about the virtues of the hair care business. During the Black Power movement of the 1960s, Morgan became a motivational speaker, encouraging African American women to take advantage of the growing hair and cosmetic industry:

> "I was a high school drop-out and it gave me an opportunity to prove that I could go as far as those who had gone to college."[688]

Morgan's inadequate formal education did not hinder her desire for a better life. In this manner she echoes Judith Butler:

> in this dominant lineage, desire is typically engendered as masculine, and figured as the pursuit of mastery through the appropriation, consumption, and negation of "what is different or unassimilable in the Other.[689]

Indeed, in this sense Morgan was like her predecessors who, despite limited education and a background of menial labor, flourished later in life because they pursued their

desire to succeed in the hair care industry.[690] Yet, despite the success of these African American women, the hair and beauty industry remained a primary white and male dominated field.[691]

As the successes of women like Washington and Morgan began to wane, George E. Johnson, an African American man, emerged as a new leader in the African American hair and beauty industries. Johnson began his work in the field in 1944 as a production chemist for S.B. Fuller, a black-owned cosmetics firm. In 1957 Johnson founded Johnson Products, where he manufactured and sold at-home (Ultra Wave) "permanent" hair straightening chemicals for African Americans and placed African American women at the center of the company's advertising.[692] In the August 1969 issue of Ebony magazine one finds an example of advertising for "Ultra Sheen." Here, Johnson manipulates the standard image of African American beauty by placing a dark skinned African American woman at the center of his advertisement. However, he reinforces the traditional notion that long hair is a symbol of beauty.[693] The model's voluminous curls are nestled around a luxurious white fur coat, suggesting that a woman who uses his products has a rich and full identity and life.[694] Here, Johnson insinuates that by using his products African American women who are already beautiful will enhance their beauty and lifestyle. This illustrates what Judith Williamson asserts:

> The product 'produces' or buys the feeling. But the more subtle level on which the advertisement works is that of 'alreadyness', which is where 'totemism' becomes a part of ideology: you do not simply buy the product in order to become a part of the group it represents; you must feel that you already, naturally, belong to that group and therefore you will buy it.[695]

Thus, the ideology[696] propagated and associated with Johnson's products assists some African American women in constructing and performing their assumed identity,[697] i.e., an identity of beauty and contemporary style.[698]

Johnson's advertisement in the October 1978 issue of Ebony magazine also shows a beautiful African American woman in a less ostentatious setting. Here, the model appears to be enjoying nature, showing that she has leisure time to appreciate the nicer things of life: nature, fruit, and for nurturing her hair with Johnson's "hair food." Johnson's advertisement sends the message that African American women must tend to their hair with the quality of care that a gardener gives her garden. Furthermore, Johnson's advertisement sends African American women the subliminal message that they must learn to practice "enjoying their bodies."[699] Of course, Johnson's advertisements are not without complications. While (re)positioning African American women as subjects, they also objectify their subject. African American women have a long history of being (mis)represented as objects of male desire.[700] Sadly, this is a common criticism applicable to many advertisements.[701] It is particularly difficult for an African American woman (or any woman, for that matter) in an advertisement to "enjoy her body" without being "drowned out by the incessant humming of male desires."[702]

Johnson's business grew into a multimillion dollar conglomerate that he and his family sold in 1993 to white-owned IVAX for a reported 60 million dollars.[703] This sale left other hair care businesses catering to African Americans, Latin Americans, and Asians struggling to stay competitive with white-owned giants like IVAX.[704] IVAX and its competitors continued to promote their hair care products with advertisements featuring African American women with straight hair of various lengths (mostly long) and

provocative messages. For example, an advertisement for Dark and Lovely chemical hair straightener in the August 1980 issue of Essence magazine showcases a model with a medium length bob haircut.

During the late 1980s African American models still reflected the long and chemically straightened look, but models like Roshumba (and actress Halle Berry) helped to open doors for models with short hair to appear in advertisements.[705] Shades of Jones' and Berry's short hair cuts are shown in advertisements by white owned companies like Dark and Lovely and African Pride in the 1999 September issue of Ebony magazine.[706]

The brief shift in short hairstyles gracing the covers of chemical relaxer boxes coincided with another brief shift away from relaxed long hair to braids of various lengths, as evidenced in the December 1990 issue of Essence magazine encouraging readers to start "Reclaiming Our Culture"[707] Even as African American women were encouraged to "reclaim" their culture, advertisements for chemically straightened hair remained prevalent, as did the notion that African American women's hair was a problem. For example, in the September 1999 issue of Ebony magazine, a provocative advertisement for "Emergency 911" chemically straightened hair repair product showcased three African American women dressed in action adventure Lycra and knee pads, holding blow dryers and curling irons as if they were artillery for an intense battle. The caption reads:

> "My power is yours, proclaimed Agent 911. With me you are now safe from the weapons of your own destruction."

Indeed, hundreds of years after enslavement, African American women are still being told through popular culture that their hair is a battlefield. "Agent 911" comes in to tame the African American woman's chemically straightened / heat-damaged hair. The need for "Agent 911" also illustrates the determination of some African American women to

chemically alter their hair at the risk of further damage. Likewise, the "At One with Nature" carrot oil conditioner advertisement in the August 2000 issue of Essence magazine suggests that their beta carotene vitamin rich product will "naturally" help African American woman achieve longer and stronger hair. The lower left hand corner of the advertisement also shows their product being used to chemically straighten African American women's hair, implying that relaxing the hair is a natural choice for African American women who desire stronger and longer hair.

While the desire for long hair is rooted in the sexual, it also encompasses the desire, conscious or unconscious, to have access to more resources. Thus, the desire covers all types of longings.[708] However, the problematic notion of desire is the heart and soul of the messages advertisers give women; i.e., the emphasis is always on being desirable, not on experiencing desire. [709] However, the "Soft and Beautiful" advertisement in the June 2000 issue of Essence magazine is about experiencing desire and being desirable. The caption reads:

> I AM multi-talented, versatile; creative…I AM all these things and more. Certainly such as woman is to be desired and by making these proclamations she can ultimately realize her desire to "all these things and more."

The woman makes her desire known by declaring the type of person she is or wants to be. The subliminal message is that the use of "Soft and Beautiful" will help her obtain both being desired and experiencing desire because she has chemically straightened hair. In this manner, it seems that the advertisers anticipate the consumer's desire and evoke it with their words and image of the long straight hair. In this manner, the consumer's desire to use this product to have the type of hair she wants functions as a "force of positive production, the action that creates things, makes alliances, and forges

interactions".[710] Ultimately, this advertisement essentially touts the networking possibilities of using "Soft and Beautiful." Furthermore, the positive traits of "beauty, femininity, multi-talented, versatile, and creative" associated with chemically straightened hair will assist African American women in performing part of their identity. After IVAX purchased Johnson's Products in 1993, the look of Johnson's advertisements took on a different tone. For instance, an online advertisement features a young light-skinned African American woman (presumably an entertainer) with long straight hair holding a guitar. One reading reveals that this woman is an object in the advertisement. On the other hand, another reading suggests that the woman's long, straight hair and (more blatantly) the guitar are both phallic symbols that convey the power she might have over her career and her life.[711] In addition to power and control, her phallicized hair also expresses fun, freedom and safety from violation.[712] The Ultra Sheen hair products associated with these elements of success and identity for African American woman could convince the patron to purchase this product over another.

A second online advertisement shows two African American women professional women chastising a white male employee. One of the women is wearing an Afro; the other woman is wearing braids. At first glance, the image of two African American women "reading"[713] the white man may conjure up images of Sapphire.[714] As an alternative, the women in this advertisement may be understood to embody the model of a "holistic personality," such that their hair comprises a space that is removed from a white female normative standard of beauty and thinking.[715] Also, the women in the advertisement are dressed professionally, while the man wears a white short-sleeved shirt that signifies status as an underling, rather than as a peer. The advertisement suggests that these young

African American women with natural hairstyles have achieved some power without having to emulate white standards of beauty. Their natural hairstyles function together as a source of unified power that can handle any problems that the "white man" sends their way. In this way, their hairstyles are a nod to gender and racial solidarity. Thus, the new white owners of Johnson's Products may be interpret as saying their products can help African American women enhance their beauty and rise to power. These alternative readings illustrate that the African Americans are not "cultural dupes"[716] and can find meanings in the advertisement beyond the perceived intended message, which, according to Barbara Coles, is "Women, you got to do something about your hair."[717] This capability provides hope for African American women that wish to enhance their beauty and rise to power.

In August 2000, the editorial staff of *Essence* magazine devoted the entire issue to the subject of hair. One of the magazine's dialogues focused on the nature of the messages conveyed in hair advertisements. African American[718] women from various backgrounds shared their stories about their hair, emphasizing that their hairstyle choice is deeply political. Acclaimed actress Lorraine Toussaint asserts:

> When I went from locks to straight, folks judged me: With locks I was a down sister, basically more "Black." And with processed hair I had sold out. Bull! In the year 2000 it's all relative. There are many fronts in this fight…We choose our battle gear.[719]

Toussaint exposes the dubious hierarchy of hair that some African Americans want to maintain in the quest to fight cultural colonialism. Indeed, Toussaint's hair politics is a reflection of the complexities and contradictions of hair politics that are present in other areas of popular culture` such as television.

Television

Like other forms of popular culture, television has contributed to the construction and reconstruction of issues of race and hair politics in African American female identity. At the same time, images of African American women on television have also reflected changes in mainstream perceptions of African American women. This is evident when considering early television images of African American women where their covered hair functioned as a marker of their identities as servants. For example, on June 14, 1939, actress and pop singer Ethel Waters (1896-1977) starred as the lead in an eponymous experimental variety show on NBC.[720] The glamorous hair style Waters wore in that show was altered drastically when she took over the role of maid on ABC's sitcom "Beulah" (1950-1952) as originated by Louise Beavers.[721] As Beulah, Water's stylish hair is enveloped by a scarf that subverts any reading of her (and other African American women) as feminine and beautiful. Like the mammy of old, Water's Beulah is large, wears her hair covered, is unmarried (read: asexual), and is happy to work.[722]

African American women would not be at the center of a television show again until the premiere of actress Diahann Carroll's "Julia" (1968-1971) on September 24, 1968. Julia was a widowed nurse (her husband died in Viet Nam) raising her son in Los Angeles. Unlike Beulah, Carroll's Julia is not presented as asexual. With her light skin, fashion-forward outfits, and short, carefully straightened coiffed hair, Julia is presented as an object of desire of Paul Winfield (Paul Cameron) and Fred Williamson (Steve Bruce). Moreover, Julia's image, coupled with storylines that do not rigorously interrogate the subjects of racism and sexism, tell audiences that this is a safe show to watch. Julia will not force the viewer to deal with the issue of race because she does not use her race in

constructing and performing her identity. This aspect of Julia's show was deliberate, as the star reveals:

> The moneyed people, the managers, know they can deal with me. I'm 'acceptable,'" she said. "In fact, I'm sure that's why I got the part of Julia. I'm a black woman with a white image. I'm as close as they can get to having the best of both worlds. The audience can accept me in the same way, and for the same reason. I don't scare them.[723]

Carroll is conscious that Julia's image and demeanor stand in stark contradiction to those of Angela Davis and other African American female activists during the 1960s because her conversations did not address internalized gendered racism. Julia works as a nurse for the U.S. Department of Defense, thereby supporting an agent of war opposed by Davis and other activists. In addition, her independence and unmarried status may further be interpreted as signs of defeminization. In contrast, Davis' political activism and famously large Afro became symbols of racial pride that were ultimately linked to the women in "Blaxploitation" films.[724] Television would later see echoes of Davis' infamous Afro[725] in likable but outspoken female characters on the series "Good Times" (Esther Rolle-Florida Evans, Janet DuBois-Willona Woods, and BernNadette Stanis-Thelma Evans), "The Jeffersons" (Isabel Sanford as Louise Jefferson, Jennie and Helen –both started with Afros but later pressed their hair), and "Get Christie Love." Of the three shows, it was the Los Angeles police comedy-drama "Get Christie Love"[726] (starring Teresa Graves) that provided the most obvious reverberation of Davis' Afro. Graves' Christie works as an undercover police officer who uses weapons, martial arts, and colloquial vernacular ("You're under arrest, sugah") to catch law enforcement adversaries (e.g., Angela Davis). "Get Christie Love" can be construed as a means of showcasing topical intersectional politics[727] raging at the time while trying to advertise

products. Thus, the Afro-wearing crime solver Christie Love was a woman breaking down the walls of racial and gender injustices---pushing a liberal agenda of inclusion without forcing her racial and gender political perspective down the viewer's throats. At the same time, Christie is reminded of her real power every week when she has to answer to the white male police chief. This hierarchy serves to water down the distinctiveness of the hair style by implying to the audiences that Christie (and other women) are on "our" team---they work for us and we control them. These weekly displays of control over Christie provide a subtext in the reservoir of popular culture stating there is little that is dangerous about Afros and those that wear them; in fact, they are humorous.[728] This point is underscored through Christie's male colleagues teasing her and Christie's funny, sassy catch phrase "You're under arrest, sugah." In this manner, the mocking and humor directed at the Afro, along with its adoption by whites, may have hastened its (temporary) death and loss of political currency.

Later audiences are given another brief glimpse of the Afro on a quasi-Mammy character in the 1981 sitcom "Gimme a Break" starring Broadway actress and singer Nell Carter. Carter portrays Nell Harper, a woman who moves into the home of her deceased friend Margaret Kanisky to help care for her home, her widowed husband Carl, and her children. When the series premiered, Carter's life revolved around the Kanisky home and family. Carter was seen wearing a short Afro, scolding Carl, and giving out unsolicited no-nonsense advice. When the series returned for its second season, Carter's short Afro was replaced by a straightened short bouffant reminiscent of Carroll's Julia. Carter also stops dispensing as much of her tough love advice; hugs the children more, and talks frequently about her hopes for a love life. These changes serve to soften Carter's

character's image and make her less confrontational and threatening. In addition, the children's grandfather moves into the house, acting as a silent chaperone. The grandfather's presence, combined with Carter's character's incessant dialogue about finding a man, is meant to make sure the audience knows that Carter's real purpose for living with the Kaniskys is to take care of their family. The elderly grandfather represents yet another charge that Carter is there to take eare of, and her repeated mentions of needing a love life is a marker for the audience that there will be no love pairing between Carter's character and the widowed Carl Kanisky. These changes also serve to resurrect the mammy image.

These images of African American women on television have sprung from the consciousness of whites, primarily white men. On September 20, 1984, Bill Cosby countered these stereotypical images through his new siteom "The Cosby Show," which foeuses on the lives of Cliff Huxtable, an Afriean American doctor, his eorporate lawyer wife, Claire Huxtable, and their five children. The show's narratives focused on a variety of lived experiences[729]; dialogues about the subjeets of race and raeism, however, were nearly nonexistent.[730] The de-emphasis of race allowed the images and stories of the Huxtable family to become aceessible to white audiences. Race is emphasized through the Huxtable women's hairstyles, which provide a visual dialogue about African American female aesthetic and culture, and illuminate the fluidity of racial identity.[731] When the show premiered, the women on the show wore their hair in variation of mostly long and short hairstyles that did not reproduee a hierarchieal aesthetic within the African American community. At first reading the straight hair of some of the Huxtable women might be construed as demonstrating an assimilationist view. However, when Denise, the

Huxtables' second born, returns from Africa, she is wearing African clothing and dreadlocks. In this sense, Denise's hair symbolizes pride in her African aneestry as opposed to one who is trying to be embraced by mainstream society. Later, when Denise euts her dreadlocks, she wears an Afro, further demonstrating racial pride via her hairstyle. Vanessa and Rudy, the two youngest Huxtable girls, also illustrate racial pride when they wear micro braids, an asymmetrical Afro, a elosely eropped Afro, or twists. What the Huxtable women illuminate is a somewhat subtle dialogue about the sitcom's effort to show that African American identity is not monolithic or static and can be expressed through a variety of hairstyles which perform African American female identity from numerous subjeet positions. This point is further underseored in "A Different World," the spin-off introduced by Bill Cosby in 1987. Initially, the show focused on daughter Denise and her experienees as an undergraduate at Hillman College, a fictional Historically Black College and the Huxtable parents' alma mater. During that first season nearly all the African Ameriean women on the show had long hair and were fair skinned. In the second season, dancer/ aetress Debbie Allen took over as director and altered the show's tone and appearance in several ways. First, the show no longer played strictly for laughs. While still a eomedy, the show also explored a myriad of eultural, social, and political issues such as internalized racism, sexual harassment, adoption, and apartheid.[732] Seeond, Allen replaeed Lisa Bonet (Denise) as the show's lead with actress Jasmine Guy (Whitley). Denise and Whitley had mueh in eommon: both were from upper elass African Ameriean families, were light skinned, were slight in build, and had long hair. The differenees between the women were in geographic ethos, with Denise being from the East coast and Whitely being from the South. Also, the other supporting

African American female cast members varied in their body types, skin tones, and hair textures and lengths,[733] signifying that African American women do not have to be thin, light skin and have long hair in order to be beautiful and have access to resources such higher education.

The impact of Allen's changes on African American female identity and hair politics on television can be seen in the 1993 sitcom "Living Single." "Living Single" focused on the professional and personal lives of Regine, Sinclair, Maxine, and Khadijah, four upwardly mobile African Americans living in New York City. The show presented a variety of hairstyles, ranging from long weaves to braids. Regine, the resident diva and social climber, changed her hair from week to week, seldom repeating a hairstyle. Maxine, a lawyer, began wearing her hair straight at medium length while working for a law firm, and later switched to braids after she began working as a public defender. These changes in hairstyles tell the viewer that African American woman can reflect more of their cultural heritage and identity outside the confines of corporate America, and must subvert more of their identity performance to be part of a corporate community. The braids and natural hairstyles of African American women in corporate America are viewed as deviant or monstrous for a corporate environment which strongly encourages conformity.[734] [735]

Like "Living Single", the cable television drama (Showtime) "Soul Food" focuses on the personal and professional lives of three African American women: sisters Teri Joseph (portrayed by Nicole Ari Parker), Maxine Joseph Chadway (portrayed by Vanessa Williams), and Tracy 'Bird' Joseph van Adams (portrayed by Malinda Williams). Like "The Cosby Show," "Soul Food" highlights a variety of aesthetics for the main characters

and does not situate one hair style or length over another. In this manner, the show sends a message that there is a wide spectrum of ways that African American women can style their hair to perform their identity.

"Soul Food" also used hair politics to engage in a discussion about internalized racism among African Americans. In the episode "Decisions and Choices"[736] Maxine questions her son Ahmad (portrayed by Aaron Meeks) about his preference for girlfriends with long straight/curly hair and light skin. Maxine decides to test her suspicion and introduces Ahmad to a friend's daughter, Noni, who is dark-skinned with short hair. Ahmad, however, is immediately attracted to her cousin Amina, who has light skin and very long, curly hair, and begins to date her. When Maxine confronts Ahmad on what she thinks is his color-struck behavior, he considers his mother's assertion but does not stop seeing Amina. Ahmad's father Kenny (portrayed by Rochmond Dunbar) later points out to Maxine that Ahmad (who attends a prestigious, nearly all white prep school) might marry a white woman.[737] To this Maxine implies that she wants her son to learn to love African American beauty in all its forms when she says "I just want him to remember that he got a brown-skinned mama." In this way, "Soul Food" highlights how an issue as old as slavery in America continues to plague African Americans of all ages. More specifically, such preferences like Ahmad's send the message to dark skinned African American women that they have less aesthetic currency and will be passed over for women who have features that have historically been deemed more attractive in choosing a mate. "Soul Food" tackled this issue in an unflinching manner, reminding viewers that hair is an important part of an African American woman's identity.[738]

Music (Blues)

> Whatever constitutes a Black Aesthetic has and will rest on the musician. The black musician is ahead of everyone in the expression of true black sensibility. For him, negritude or soul or blackness has never been a matter of soapbox articulation. The musician has not expressed his self through the power for speech or an African wardrobe. More than any other kind of black artist, the musician creates his own and his people's soul essence, his own negritude.[739]

> ... (B)lack music is seen as life itself, pressed to its purest essence. The musican is, therefore, imagined not only as a contributor of "sorrow songs" and a legacy of endurance; increasingly, s/he assumes an evangelical role, and "the music" is embraced as a manifestation of radical interrogation and transgressive innovation.[740]

These opening epigraphs demonstrate the significance of African American music in the lives of its artists and audiences. Moreover, they reflect how music labors to be transformative in critiquing and examining culture. Throughout history there are songs about African Americans from within and outside the community that explore race and, more specifically, hair and identity politics. For example, African American songwriter Gussie Davis wrote a song "When They Straighten All the Colored People's Hair" in 1894 that presented African American hair as problematic:

Oh, you jolly little "nigger," you make a funny figure.
For your wool kinks up just like the letter "o."
And you seem to be happy, although your head is nappy.
But then never mind, 'twill always not be so.
They have a new invention, and they say it's their intention,
To experiment on darkeys everywhere.
Oh, your face it may be dark, but you'll be happy as a lark--
When they straighten all the colored people's hair.[741]

Davis' song reinforces and reflects the same racist ideology and animalistic rhetoric that enslaved Africans recall in their life writings. Also, Davis assumes that African Americans who appear happy with nappy hair are really unhappy and will only be truly happy when their hair is straightened. Like Davis, white singer Richard Whiting writes in

his 1916 song "Mammy's Little Coal Black Rose," of an African American mother that sings to her son to convince him that she loves and adores him even though he is not white:

I heard a pickaninny crying
Down in Tennessee one night;
His little heart was nearly breaking
Just because he wasn't white;
Then his dear old Mammy kiss'd him
And she said "Chile don' you sigh
Weep no more, my baby,"
Then she sang a Dixie Lullaby:

And then I saw that dear old Mammy
Kiss those baby tears away
While in her arms the baby nestled
Happy as a child at play;
Then she whispered "Mammy loves you,
You're as sweet as 'possum pie,
Go to sleep, my honey, While your mammy sings a lullaby"

Chorus

You better dry your eyes, my little Coal Black Rose
(and don't you cry)
You better go to sleep and let those eyelids cloes
(just hush a-by)
'Cause you're dark, don't start apinin'
Your're a cloud with a silver lining;
Tho' ev'ry old crow thinks his babe am white as snow,
Your dear old Mammy knows you're mighty like a rose;
And when the angels gave those kinky curls to you
(so curly que)
They put a sunbeam in your disposition too, that's true,
The reason you're so black I 'spose
They forgot to give your Mammy a talcum powder chamois,
So don't you cry, don't you sigh,
'Cause you're mammy's little Coal Black Rose

While Whiting was known for writing songs that romanticized the South,[742] his classification of African American hair in this song connects their hair to God's angels in heaven. In this way, the unintentional subtext of this song is that African Americans should appreciate their hair because God in heaven (biblical support) does not make

mistakes[743] and that human beings have misread the aesthetic beauty and value of African Americans hair. This viewpoint disrupts racist ideology that views African American hair as ugly in comparison to whites.

Music has a unique role in disrupting and critiquing social orders that James C. Scott refers to as "infrapolitics," meaning that musicians create through music day-to-day modes of resisting hegemony.[744] Scott describes the application of infrapolitics at carnival:

> For our purpose, what is most interesting about carnival is the way it allows certain things to be said, certain forms of social power to be exercised that are muted or suppressed outside this ritual sphere. The anonymity of the setting, for example, allows the social sanctions of the small community normally exercised through gossip to assume a more full-throated voice. Among other things, carnival is "the people's informal courtroom" in which biting songs and scolding verses can be sung directly to the disrespected and malefactors. The young can scold the old, women can ridicule men, cuckholded or henpecked husbands may be openly mocked, the bad-tempered and stingy can be satirized, muted personal vendettas and factional strife can be expressed. Disapproval that would be dangerous or socially costly to vent at other times is sanctioned during carnival. It is the time and place to settle, verbally at least, personal and social scores. [745]

Thus, Whiting's song unintentionally disrupts racist ideology through its use of infrapolitics.

Additional disruption and critiques come from African American artists in the genres of blues, jazz, R&B, and hip-hop. Musicians in these genres often engage in antiphonal (call and response) performances that have a conversation with or provoke action from their audience. For example, Blues vocalist Sara Martin includes hair in her 1922 song "Mean Tight Mama:"

> Now my hair is nappy and I don't wear no clothes of silk.
> Now my hair is nappy and I don't wear no clothes of silk.
> But the cow that's Black and ugly has often got the sweetest milk.

> Now, when a man starts jivin' I'm tighter than a pair of shoes.
> Now, when a man starts jivin' I'm tighter than a pair of shoes.
> I'm a mean tight mama, with my mean tight mama blues.[746]

Martin's speaker is conscious of the interconnectedness of hair, beauty, class, and sexuality. The lyrics convey an understanding of the currency of hair that is not nappy, and yet contends that there is value in this dark and nappy haired woman. Martin sings as a woman who is confident and does not appear to be concerned with societal views on beauty standards or being sexually subdued. She is a woman who is in control of her hair, body, sexuality, and identity as a conscious and liberated African American woman. As an artist, Martin is also in control of the representation she contributes to popular culture. Stuart Hall addresses the issue of control and representation in his famous proposition on Black popular culture:

> it is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are. There is no escape from the politics of representation, and we can not wield 'how life really is out there' as a kind of test against which the political rightness or wrongness of a particular cultural strategy or text can be measured.[747]

Although Martin's representation predates Hall's suggestion, it illustrates the fine point of controlling one's image and how one constructs meaning from these representations in popular culture.[748] Such control over one's aesthetic, cultural, political, and sexual identity becomes a strategy of resistance and liberation from society's restrictions of African American women's identities and lives.

African American women's hair and identity politics is also examined in jazz.[749] As in the blues, jazz lyrics reveal to audiences how the mapping of highs and lows of the African American female body has changed during different historical moments.[750] Nina Simone used songs ("Mississippi Goddamn" and "To Be Young Gifted and Black") as

means to protest the oppression of African Americans during the modern civil rights movement.[751] In the landmark song "Four Women," Simone explores the hair and identity politics of African American women:

My skin is black
My arms are long
My hair is wooly
My back is strong
Strong enough to take the pain
It's been inflicted again and again
What do they call me
My name is aunt sarah
My name is aunt sarah

My skin is yellow
My hair is long
Between two worlds
I do belong
My father was rich and white
He forced my mother late one night
What do they call me
My name is siffronia
My name is siffronia

My skin is tan
My hair's alright, it's fine
My hips invite you
And my lips are like wine
Whose little girl am i?
Well yours if you have some money to buy
What do they call me
My name is sweet thing
My name is sweet thing

My skin is brown
And my manner is tough
I'll kill the first mother I see
Cos my life has been too rough
I'm awfully bitter these days
Because my parents were slaves
What do they call me
My
Name
Is

Peaches

These lyrics demonstrate a long tradition of explicit social critiques through song.[752] Simone's jazz lyrics inject meaning about the culture and people into mainstream culture.[753] In most of the stanzas the African American woman's hair is mentioned, highlighting shared group experiences of a part of the identity that matters to African American women. Simone's "Four Women" challenges the 1960s cultural and political tradition of relegating African American women to the margins and situating African American men at the center.[754] By placing African American women at the center of her song, she contests African American bourgeois concepts of high culture which condescended to working class popular culture representation of African American women.[755] Simone also uses hair to consider the subject of sexuality. First, she uses Siffronia's hair to draw a link to the sexual exploitation of African American women who (like Siffronia's mother) have been raped. Simone also uses the hair to conjure up DuBois' concept of double consciousness when she sings "Between two worlds / I do belong." The second instance of hair as a means of discussing sexuality is highlighted in Sweet Thing's narrative. Unlike Siffronia, Sweet Thing appears to be in control of sexuality; she uses her features and body to earn money. Simone's omission of hair in Peaches' stanza may signify that for some women like Peaches who express militant views, hair might be thought of as a woman's issue that is secondary to the primary issue of race. Ultimately, Simone contemplates how hair offers some indication of who each of these women are during different moments in history and how it affects what matter to them and their ways of engaging various power

structures that impact their lives. The subject of hair and gender is also taken up by other African American female artists in rhythm and blues and hip hop.

Rhythm and Blues

Historian Robin D. G. Kelley contends that contemporary African American music is just as polemical as the nineteenth century slave narratives in defense of abolition.[756] Hair and identity politics are situated at the center of many rhythm and blues and hip hop songs. For example, Aretha Franklin mentions African American women's hair in her ballad "Honey," a song about a woman is in a turbulent relationship that is so stressed that her hair is falling out from trying to please the man in her life.[757] The woman's hair loss places her in a position of worthlessness in our society.[758] Later, Erykah Badu[759] sings of a woman conscious of how her hair matters in her popular single "Cleva":

> This is how I look without makeup
> And with no bra my ninny's sag down low
> My hair ain't never hung down to my shoulders
> And it might not grow
> Ya' never know
>
> But I'm clever when I bust a rhyme
> I'm cleva always on ya' mind
> She's cleva and I really wanna grow
> But why come you're the last to know?
>
> I got a little pot in my belly
> So now a days my figure ain't so fly
> My dress ain't cost nothin' but seven dollars
> But I made it fly
> And I'll tell ya why
>
> But I'm clever when I bust a rhyme
> I'm cleva always on ya' mind
> She's cleva and I really wanna grow
> But why come I'm the last to know?

At the core of Badu's "Cleva" is the politics of identity and appearance politics. In the first stanza Badu sings about hair and makes it clear that an African American woman that embraces the possibility that her hair may or may not be short forever should be "cleva" enough to understand that she still has value—even if popular culture indicates otherwise. Indeed, in a 1993 interview with Ebony magazine, Badu insists that she wants be a complete woman who works at her identity, and part of that work is using her hair as a sign that says that neither processing her hair nor[760] augmenting her body are options she would consider. Badu wants the world to know that her identity is one that embraces that which is "natural" and "positive" about her African American heritage.[761] The end message of Badu's song is that African American women should concern themselves with embracing their bodies as beautiful and learn how to work with the resources that they have. While their hair may or may not grow, the consciousness of the women will.

Like Badu, Lauryn Hill also encourages African American women to grow and shift their consciousness about hair and identity politics in her hit single "Doo Wop" (That Thing):

> Now Lauryn is only human
> Don't think I haven't been through the same predicament
> Let it sit inside your head like a million women in Philly, Penn.
> It's silly when girls sell their soul because it's in
> Look at where you be in hair weaves like Europeans
> Fake nails done by Koreans
> Come again
> Come again, come again, come again, come again[762]

Hill, who wore dreadlocks at the time this album was produced, uses her lyrics as a call to arms for African American women to discontinue purchasing hair weaves in an attempt to replicate a white female normative beauty standard. Hill's words encourage African American women to perform an identity that does not include fake hair and nails.

As Hill critiques the practice of using hair weaves she is careful not to situate herself as superior. She admits that she too has succumbed to the pressures of Western aesthetics at the cost of selling herself short.

Like Hill, singer India Aria critiques the western hair aesthetics embraced by African American women in her song: "I AM Not My Hair."

> Good hair means curls and waves
> Bad hair means you look like a slave
> At the turn of the century
> Its time for us to redefine who we be
> You can shave it off
> Like a South African beauty
> Or get in on lock
> Like Bob Marley
> You can rock it straight
> Like Oprah Winfrey
> If its not what's on your head
> Its what's underneath and say HEY....[763]

In this positive self-image song, Arie acknowledges the importance of hair in African American women's identity performance while asserting that it is merely one aspect of that performance. Arie claims that the goal of her music is to "spread love and healing through music."[764] Moreover, Arie's lyrics also demonstrate a clear indication that she does not embrace a hair hierarchy of hairstyles among African American women, but places emphasis on the individual's consciousness. African American female musicians lend their voice to the growing dialogue about hair and identity politics and illustrate Michael Eric Dyson's contention that contemporary music attempts to engage audiences about some of the most important cultures forces in their lives.[765]

African American music, like other modes of popular culture, becomes, as James Baldwin succinctly contends: "our witness, and our ally. The beat is the confession which recognizes changes and conquers time."[766] Baldwin points out that African Americans have a long history of using music to relate the experiences of African American women. Using music to (re)think African American women's hair and identity politics allows for a view in how historically their bodies and identities have long been rooted in labor and reproduction, a point Gilroy clarifies:

> Their convergence is also undercut by the simple fact that in the critical thought of blacks in the West, social self-creation through labor is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes. For the descendants of slaves, work signifies servitude, misery, and subordination. Artistic expression, expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitute for freedom from bondage, therefore becomes the means toward both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation. Poiesis and poetics begin to coexist in novel form---autobiographical writing, special and uniquely creative ways of manipulating spoken language, and above all, the music.[767]

As Gilroy shows, African American music assists in redirecting how African American identity is (re)presented. For it is music, like other genres of popular culture, that affords African American women the opportunity to (re)conceptualize their identity and aesthetic traditions for themselves and the world.

NOTES

[555] Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" People's History and Socialist Theory, ed. Ralph Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 238.

[556] Deborah Grayson argues that African American women's hair is performative. See Deborah Grayson, "Is it Fake? Black Women's Hair as Spectacle and Spec(tac)ular," Camera Obscura Collective 36 (1995): 13-31.

[557] Grayson 14.

[558] bell hooks, Art on My Mind: Visual Politics (New York: New Press, 1995) 85.

[559] bell hooks argues that popular culture can permit some African American women the chance to control the way they are (re)presented as well as control the way they are exploited. See bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 65.

[560] Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hahn, eds. The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Buddhist/Christian Awareness (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000) 129.

[561] Graeme Turner, British Cultural Studies: An Introduction (New York: Routledge, 1992) 219.

[562] Lawrence Grossberg, ed., "On Postmodernism and articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall,"Journal of Communication Inquiry 10.2 (1986) 54-55.

[563] Ntozake Shange, Nappy Edges (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972)148.

[564] When hair "turns back" or "goes back home" this refers to African American hair that has been straightened and reverts back to its natural form. See Linda Jones, Nappyisms : Affirmations for Nappy-Headed People and Wannabes (Dallas: Manelock, 2003) 99.

[565] Madhu Dubey, Black Women Novelist and the Nationalist Aesthetic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 23.

[566]Stuart Hall, "Mininal Selves," Studying Culture:An Introductory Reader, eds. Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (London: Edward Arnold, 1993) 45.

[567]Stanley J Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920," American Quarterly 29.1(1977)102-116.

[568] Marvin McAllister, White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies and Gentlemen of Colour: William Brown's African and American Theater (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 60-65.

[569] Sandra L Richards, "Writing the Absent Potential: Drama, Performance, and the Canon of African-American Literature," Performance and Performativity, eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995) 64-88.

[570] Here the term subversive is used because this work (like the work of other African American women) produces ideas and values that have not been orchestrated by the dominant culture. Such work assists in beginning discussions for African American women's transformation, self-definition, and performance of their bodies and identities.

[571]Bakhtin asserts that carnivalesque figure has the "right to be 'other' in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available." In this manner, Bakhtin demonstrates that it is acceptable for the 'other' to disrupt societal hierarchies. See Bakhtin, Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four essays. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 159.

[572]Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993) 2.

[573] Butler 18.

[574] Janell Hobson argues that women of African descent, starting with one of the earliest documented examples of Saartjie Baartman (aka Hottentot Venus), have a long history of being symbols of ugliness, that the link between blackness and grotesquerie has plagued them as they live under the influence of dominant white culture. See, Janell

Hobson, "The "Batty" Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body" Hypatia 18:4 (2003):87-105.

[575] It is my contention that early images of pickinnaies, with their matted, dirty looking, and wild hair were meant to mark African American females as unattractive and odd.

[576] Gwendolyn Brooks, Report from Part One: Autobiography (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972) 37.

In this autobiography Brooks states that: "when I was a child, it did not occur to me even once, that the black in which I was encased ...would be considered, one day, beautiful. Similarly, Michele Wallace recalls how the natural or Afro was associated with being a prostitute. The Afro was seen as transgressive or deviant, that women with these hairstyles are working outside of thc confines that society has set up---meaning that if one is not transgressive they replicate the white standard of female normative. See Michele Wallace, Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory (New York: Verso, 1990) 18.

[577] Marta K. Mootry and Gary Smith, eds. , A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 43.

[578]Thornton Dill argues that women's work in African American culture has generated alternative notions of what it means to be a woman. See Bonnie Thorton Dill, "The Dialectics of Black Womanhood," Fcminism and Methodology, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 98.

[579]bell hooks, Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism (Boston: South End Press, 1981) 194-5.

[580] Noliwe M Rooks, HairRaising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univcrsity Press, 1996) 13.

[581] Samuel Elworthy argues that "each human is born into a world filled with chains of signifiers: the expressive form in which social and cultural power is constituted. See Samuel Elworthy, "From Cocksure to Cockeyed," Unpublished Seminar Paper, Rutgers University, Dccember 1991. Additionally, while white women are situated as the standard of beauty and femininity this is not without its own set of complications. In fact, Edwin Schur writes: "One way or another, virtually everywoman in our society is affected by the dominant definitions of deviance... relatively speaking femaleness [itself] appears to be a devalued status." See Edwin Schur, Labcling Women Deviant: Gcnder, Stigma, and Social Control (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984) 5.

[582] Ntozake Shangc, Three Pieces (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) 47.

[583] Shange 47.

[584] This moment in Shange's work conjurcs up the fairytalc images of Rapunzel and the story of Lady Godiva both of whom hair played a role in liberation themselves or othcrs.

[585] Simone de Beavoir, The Second Sex, ed. and trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Modern Library, 1952) xxviii.

[586] Pearl Clcagc, "Hairpeace," African American Review 27.1(1993): 37-41.

[587] Cleage 40.

[588] This point is made by Dr. Beal. See Annc C Beal, The Black Parenting Book: Caring For Our Children Thc First Five Years (New York: Broadway Books, 1999) 208.

[589] In fact, in Bishop Albert Cleage, Jr.(aka Jaramogi Abebe Agyemen) infamously claimed:

> "I use the concept of a 'nation within a nation' to describe the separation that's enforced on Black people…The white man has done too good a job. I was separated from the day I was born…You can't ask me if I'm advocating separatism…I just inherited it."

While this one moment does not sum up Cleage as a man or parent, nonetheless it does seem out of line with his political and cultural thinking at that time. See J. Martin Bailey and Charles Cobb, "Interview: Al Cleage on Black Power," United Church Herald February 1968: 28.

[590] Scholarship shows that as children develop their sense of identity they do so from a variety of sources from family and peers. This development begins with foundation that parents establish and continue throughout the individual's lifetime. See for example, Murray Krantz, Child Development: Risk and Opportunity (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1994) 522.

[591] See Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans (New York: Anchor, 1993) 55.

[592]See June Jordan, "Poem About my Rights," The Norton Anthology African American Literature, eds. Henry Louis, Gates and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997) 2231-2233.

[593]Deborah McDowell, The Changing Same: Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 109.

[594] Joan W Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader, eds. Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Christina Gilmartin, and Robin Lydenberg (New York: Oxford, 1999) 79-99.

[595]Mikita Brottman, High Theory / Low Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) xv.

[596] George Orwell, "Boy's Weeklies," Horizon March 3, 1939: 27.

[597] Brottman xvi.

[598] Brottman xxi

[599]Fredrik Stromberg, Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History (Korea: Fantagraphics Books, 2003) 2

[600] Stromberg 73.

[601] The asexual extraordinarily large Mammy was ever available and prepared to serve the needs of whites. See Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) 202. Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1991) 78.

[602] In Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin Topsy appears as a clownish and disruptive child. Similar to images like Topsy (or the birth of the pickanniny) can be seen in films, advertisements, and other modes of popular culture. See Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Toms' Cabin (New York: Bantam Books, 1981) and Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994) 7-8.

[603] Stowe 236-7.

[604] Stowe 279.
[605] Stromberg 49.
[606] Stromberg 49.

[607] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, The Cultural Logic of Euthanasia: "Sad Fancyings" in Herman Melville's "Bartleby," American Literature 76.4 (2004): 777-806.

[608]Here I am borrowing Thomson's notion that female and disabled bodies are "cast as deviant and inferior." When African American women can not fashion their bodies and hair to resemble whites they are thought to be inferior. See Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature (New York: Garland Press, 1997) 19.
[609] Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds., Black Women in America: An Historical Encylopedia,Volume II M-Z (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 903.
[610] Kanan Joseph Heise, "Jackie Ormes" Drew Comic Strip 'Torchy,' Chicago Tribune (January 3, 1986) 68.
[611]Valerie Smith, Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminists Readings (New York: Routledge, 1998) xviii-xix.
[612]Hazel Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford, 1987) 6.
[613] Mary Russo, "Female Grotesque: Carnival and Theory," Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 220.
[614] Russo 217.
[615] While de Lauretis makes her argument for the lesbian women, I apply it here for African American females. See Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David Halperib, eds., "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader (New York: Routledge, 1993) 149-150.
[616]Matthew Pustz, Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999) 63.
[617] Arleen B. Dallery argues that the female body is not merely flesh but is a text to be read carefully and critically. See Arleen B. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (The) Body: Ecriture Feminine, Gender, Body, Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 54.
[618] Stromberg 143.
[619] While the strip ran for four year in the Chicago Tribune it was no immensely popular, but in 1975 Friday Foster was turned into a blaxploitation film starring African American actress Pam Grier. Stromberg 143.

[620] Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation," Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies eds., David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York, 1996) 141.

[621] Ernesto Laclau asserts that articulation is a space where struggle against hegemony occurs. See, Ernesto Laclau, "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms," Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998) 254.

[622] Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds., Black Women in America: An Historical Encylopedia,Volume 1 A-L (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993)162.

[623] Pustz x-xi.

[624] Like Brandon satirist Aaron McGruder also examines African American hair and identity politics in his comic strip "The Boondoeks."

[625] Within the African American community the term "good hair" typically means hair that closely approximates the hair texture of whites. However, in an effort to produce a paradigm shift in African American hair politics Linda Jones argues that "good hair" is hair that is "Nappy Hair. Healthy hair. All textures of hair. Any hair." See Linda Jones, Nappyisms: Affirmations for Nappy-Headed People and Wannabes! (Dallas: Mmanelock, 2003) 99.

[626] Collins 79-80.

[627] Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, Hair Story: Untangling The Roots of Black Hair in America (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001) 126.

[628] Brottman argues that comic strips are powerful means of communication. Brottman 130.

[629] Ray Billingsley, "Crusaders with pen and ink -African American cartoonists," Ebony January 1993: 36-37.

[630]The accusations that Walker's images are controversial are rooted in the contention that her work reinforces negative stereotypes about African American women. However, cultural critic Michele Wallace disagrees, arguing that Walker's images reveal how African Americans have used their art to showcase the beauty of African Americans and how this beauty helped them to survive a long history of racial and sexual exploitation. See Ian Berry, Darby English, Vivian Patterson, and Mark Reinhardt, eds., "The Enigma of Negress Kara Walker" Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) 87.

[631] Shane White and Graham J. White, Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 47

[632] On the PBS web site Kara Walker states "I knew that if I was going to make work that [dealt] with race issues, they were going to be full of contradictions. PBS: Kara Walker, www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/provocations/kara/2.html.

[633] The black sheep in popular culture represents the notion that African Americans are the source of all the problems or ills in society. Stromberg 119.

[634] Saidiya Hartman, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford, 1997) 50-51.

[635] Peggy Phelan argues that photographs of some African American can help in exposing how their bodies are confined by racism and sexism. See Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: The Politics of Performance (New York: Routledge, 1992) 158

[636] Stuart Hall, "What is this 'black' in Black Popular Culture?" Stuart Hall Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies, eds., Morley, David and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996) 468.

[637] Deborah Willis, Lorna Simpson (San Francisco: D.A.P./Distributed Arts Publishers, 1992) 6.

[638] Willis 22.

[639] Sylvia Wolf, ed., Focus: Five Women Photographers (Morton Grove: Albert Whitman and Company, 1994) 55.

[640] Coco Fusco, Uncanny Dissonance: The Work of Lorna Simpson (Hamilton: Colgate University, 1991) 6.

[641] Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, The Black Female Body: A Photographic History. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002) 169.

[642] Ann duCille, "Phallus(ies) of Interpretations: Toward Engendering the Black Critical 'I,'" African American Literary Theory: A Reader ed., Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 443-459.

[643] Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: The Politics of Performance(New York: Routledge, 1992) 158.

[644] Willis and Williams 151.

[645] bell hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre (Boston: South End Press, 1984) 90.

[646] According to Willis and Williams being partially dressed is "more erotic."53.

[647] Byrd and Tharps 126.

[648] Throughout the Bible there are several passages such as Numbers. 6:2-5, Leviticus. 19:27; 21:5, and Revelation that indicate that dreadlocks were worn by the most devout followers (Nazirites) of Christ.

[649] In the Bible (Numbers) the Nazirites are regarded as men of God like the prophet. They do not cut their hair as is the religious law and custom. However, in some films dreadlocks have been connected to criminal activity. For example, in films like the "Belly" released in 1998 has a drug lord wear dreadlocks and one of the film's nameless and uncredited actors plays a notorious assassins that wears dreadlocks. In 1991 "New Jack City" has actress Vanessa A. Williams sporting dreadlocks as she portrays a cold blooded killer. In the film" Thelma and Louise" an African American man who refuses to let out a white police officer out of his trapped car wears dreadlocks. Critically acclaimed actor Gary Oldman portrays violent white pimp who wants to be African American and wears dreadlocks to authenticate his performance in "True Romance." Finally, John Travolta stars in "Battlefield Earth" as a leather wearing enormous alien with dreadlocks.

[650] According to Foucault racist and sexist ideology are rituals and these rituals mark the individual becoming part of the self. See Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977) 451.

[651] Wiggins is mocking model turned actress Kelly Le Brock, who was once the spokesperson for Pantene hair care products. In an infamous commercial a well coiffed Le Brock seductively stared into the camera, suggesting that the viewing audience: "Don't hate me," because I'm beautiful."

[652] Kathy Peiss, Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture (New York: Henry Holt,1998) Piess 70.

[653]Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America (New York: Broadway, 1998) 203.

[654] Johnson, Abby Arthur and Ronald Maberry Johnson, Propaganda & Aesthetics, The Literary Politics of African-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979).

[655] Dressing room and hair care. Advertisement notice. Freedman's Journal Sept. 1828.

[656] Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," Journal of Southern History 61 (1995): 45-76

[657] Abduction notice. Advertisement. Freedman's Journal. Sept. 1828.

[658] Other newspapers like the Chicago Defender, the New York Age, and the Pittsburgh Courier all advertised for beauty business people like Walker and Malone.

[659] Harper's New Monthly Magazine 2.37 (1867).

[660] Peiss argues that racist representations like this one "proliferated" advertisements initially in white newspapers, but also later in African American newspapers. Both whites and African Americans exploited African American women's desire for beauty. 108.

[661] Carney Smith, ed., Notable Black American Women (Detroit: Gale Publishers, 1991) 724-726.

[662] Cookie Lommel, Madam C. J Walker, Journey to Freedom (Holloway House Publishing, 1993) 47.

[663] Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall. Eds., The Color Complex (New York: Anchor Books, 1993) 82.

[664] Initially this was the only option to African Americans selling such goods because of discrimination in stores. Gray 55.

[665] Byrd and Tharps 76-83.

[666] The word Poro is Mende (West African) and means devotional society. Byrd and Tharps 32.

[667] DuSable Museum of African American History. Black Blue Book 1923-924. This is a collection of local African American names, addresses, business information and advertisements and samples of featured African Americans work. Dawson's information and sampling of illustrations are included.

[668] Malone's husband tried to take control of her company and the marriage ended. Smith 725.

[669] Hine and Thompson 204.

[670] Louis T Harlan and Raymond Smack, eds., Booker T. Washington Papers: 1895-1989 (Champaign: University Illinois Press, 1974) 420.

[671] According to a lecture Darlene Clark Hine gave when she was the Avalon guest lecturer at Northwestern University Malone employed Walker as a trainee at the Poro Company in 1904. Malone alleged that Walker stole her formulas while working at

her company. Since Malone did not have a patent for her products, the rumor persisted for years. In fact, some argued that it was an example of Malone's poor business acumen.

[672] Smith 725.

[673] Avalon Distinguished Visiting Professor, Darlene Clark Hine Northwestern University, Evanston Illinois April June-1997.

[674] Malone had a hair care product with the same name. In fact, other African American women in the hair care business sold hair care products with the same name, such as Madame M.B. Jackson of Kansas City Mo. Rooks 47.

[675] Rooks 47.

[676] Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training During Segregation (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003) 22.

[677] Peiss 70.

[678] Peiss 217.

[679] Blackwelder 15. Also, the types of African American publications where Walker's advertisements were featured were: The Crisis, Pittsburgh Courier, and The Messenger.

[680] Crisis Mar. 1919: 17.

[681] Avalon Lectures, Darlene Clark Hine 5.

[682] African Americans like Booker T. Washington vocalized their displeasure with African American women straightening their hair and the debates continues today. For example, Alice Walker, like Washington does not think straightening hair is a good practice for African American women because it "takes up too much time and prevents African American women from discovering their natural selves." See Alice Walker, Living by the Word (Fort Washington: Harvest Books, 1989) 74. Also, Blackwelder argues that "thousands of African American women profited from acquainting their sisters with imagined inadequacies." Blackwelder 146.

[683] Rooks 49.

[684] Blackwelder 17.

[685] Peiss 237.

[686] Blackwelder 20-21.

[687] Blackwelder 32.

[688] Morgan's remarks come from the Majorie Stewart Joyner Papers, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature (this excerpt did not have any relevant identifying information) Chicago Public Library, "Integration Comes to the Beauty" trade MSJP, box 73 circa 1970 the clipping is not identified.

[689] Judith Butler, "Desire," Critical Terms for Literary Study, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 377-379.

[690] Neither Malone nor Walker received college education or formal business training. See Jessie Carney Smith, ed., Notable Black American Women (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992) 724-726.

[691] The legacy that Malone, Walker, Washington, and Morgan began was carried on by many but one of the most successful African Americans in the hair business and major advertiser was African American George E. Johnson of JCP. Johnson, one of Morgan's competitors began his business in 1954; he sold permanent hair straighteners (Ultra Wave for men and Ultra Sheen for women) for African Americans in Chicago and thirty-nine years later sold JCP to a non-African American company IVAX for 61 million dollars in 1992. Ivax sold the company to Carson who later sold the company to L'Oreal in 1998. See Barnaby Feder, "A Leader in Black Business, Johnson Products to be Sold," New York Times June 15, 1993.

[692] Lynn Norment "The 100 Most Influential Black Americans," Ebony, 1989.

[693]Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: The Modern library, 1934) 172.

[694] As a teenager my family used Johnson's products and I remember how mother made us use the entire line of hair products (chemical relaxers, shampoos, conditioners, and hair moisturizers) because she had heard Johnson give a talk where he made this suggestion. The woman's hair in this advertisement has been permed and styled with the ultra sheen products.

[695] Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1994) 47.

[696] African American hair does reflect a performative aspect and ideology. For example, the Afro primarily affirms the wearer's commitment to "black power". Conversely, the ideology surrounding African American straightened hair is that of conformity or mimic whiteness as an aesthetic standard. See Deborah Grayson, "Is it Fake?: Black Women's Hair as Spectacle and Spec(tac)ular." Camera Obscura Collective. 36 (1995): 13-31. See also: Leon F.Litwack, Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998) 461.

[697] Anthony Synnott contends that women's identities have long been considered "tangled' up in their hair. See Anthony Synnott, "Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair," The British Journal of Sociology XXXVIII.3 (1987): 381-413.

[698] According to Veblen to be in vogue, one must have to give the impression that one consumes without having to produce anything. Meaning one is a person of means and enjoys a leisurely life. Veblen 168.

[699] Frances Donelson, Women's Experiences: A Psychological Perspective (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998) 409.

[700] There is much that has been written about women as objects for male pleasure. See for example, Frances Donelson, Women's Experiences: A Psychological Perspective (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998). Patricia Morton, Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[701] In Freidan's seminal work, the Feminine Mystique, she interrogates the manipulation of women in advertising. See Betty Friedan, Feminine Mystique (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1983). Also see, Noliwe Rooks, Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), Kathy Peiss, Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture (New

York: Henry Holt, 1998), Mary Margaret Fonow and Lucy Bailey, eds., Reading Women's Lives (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2001) Steve Craig, "Madison Avenue versus The Feminine Mystique: How the Advertising Industry Responded to the Onset of the Modern Women's Movement," Popular Culture Association Conference March, 1997, Jean Kilbourne, Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel (New York: Free Press, 1999).

[702] Michael Kimmel, "Clarence, William, Iron Mike, Tailhook, Senator Packwood, Spur Posse, Magic...And Us," Reading Women's Lives (Pearson Custom Publishing, 2001) 85.

[703] By the time Johnson sold his business to Ivax African American owned businesses controlled nearly 100% of the manufacturing and retailing of African American hair care and beauty products, however, as of today they control 30% of the market. The majority of the African American or ethnic hair care and beauty products are controlled by white owned companies according to AHBAI (the internationally renowned trade association representing the world's leading Black-owned companies that manufacture ethnic hair care and beauty related products featuring the Proud Lady Symbol). Finally, of the registered African American owned hair and beauty companies none of them are run by African American women. However, the President of L'Oreal's division Soft Sheen-Carson is an African American woman, Candace Matthews. See Cliff Hocker and Sakina P. Spruell, Black Enterprise November 2000:3.

[704] Byrd and Tharps 91-98.

[705] Byrd and Tharps 157.

[706] According to American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI) Dark and Lovely and African Pride are white owned companies. Personal Interview. 15 June 2006.

[707] Rosemary Bray, "Reclaiming Our Culture," Essence December 1990:16.

[708] Claudia Tate, Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race (New York: Oxford, 1998) 10.

[709] Jean Kilbourne, Can't Buy Me Love: How Advertising Changes How We Think and Feel (New York: Touchstone, 1999) 148.

[710] Elizabeth Grosz, Space, Time, and Perversion (New York: Routledge, 1995) 179.

[711] P Hershman, "Hair, Sex, and Dirt," Man New Series 9.2 (1974): 274-298.

[712] Lois Tyson, Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide (New York: Garlard Publishing, 1999) 21-22.

[713] Reading is like 'signifying', in that it pertains to the art of verbal insult and telling someone off. See Henry Louis Gates, Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 55-56, and Lawrence Levine, Black Culture, Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 344-358.

[714] Sapphire or bitch is a term used to represent African American woman as "aggressive, rude, and pushy." These terms are meant to "defeminize and demonize" African American women. See Patricia Hill Collins, Black Sexual Politics:African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism (New York: Routledge, 2004)123.

[715] Molefi Kete Asante, The Afrocentric Idea (Philadephia: Temple University Press, 1987) 185.

[716] Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular", People's History and Socialist Theory, eds., R. Samuel and Paul Kegan (London: Routledge, 198) 227-239.

[717] Barbara Coles, "The Power and Politics of Black Women's Hair," Why are Black women losing their hair?: The first Complete Guide to Health Hair Barry Fletcher, ed., (Seat Pleasant: Unity Publishing, 2000) 105.

[718] This work focuses on African American women, but in this issue of Essence they look primarily at the experiences of African American women other "Black" women such as African and Caribbean.

[719] "Our Hair—Untangled," Essence Aug. 2000:103-109.

[720] Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, eds., Africana The Encyclopedia of the African American Experience (New York: 1999) 49.

[721] Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films (New York:Continuum, 1994) 66.

[722] Patricia Morton, Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 9-10.

[723]"Diahann Carroll as Julia," TV Guide 14 Mar. 1970: 7-9.

[724] Blaxploitation is a film genre that emerged in the United States in the early 1970s when many exploitation films were made that targeted the urban African American audience. One of the most popular films in this genre with an African American female lead was Pam Grier's "Cleopatra Jones (1973)" as a woman fighting crimes domestically and internally for the American government as a special agent. This film and the influence of Angela Davis and other female Black Panthers likely contributed to the production of the television series "Get Christie Love". See Jennifer DeVere Brody, "The Return of Cleopatra Jones," Signs 25.1 (1999): 91-121. See Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks (New York Continuum, 1994) 251.

[725] Here I borrow from cultural critic Todd Boyd's contention that African Americans associated with films like Cleopatra Jones and individuals with features similar to those in those films represent a group of individuals that are thought of as criminal and/or subversive because they do not maintain the social order. See Todd Byrd, Am I Black Enough for You?: Popular Culture from the Hood and Beyond (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 91.

[726] Get Christie Love. American Broadcasting Company. September 1974 -June 1975.

[727] At this point in history the modern civil right movement and the women's liberation movement had African Americans and women making strides in challenging the discrimination and oppression they faced as they tried to gain access to resources for example seeking employment in male dominated fields such as the police force. For a discussion on women in the workplace during the 1970s see the following: Frank L Mott, ed., The Employment Revolution: Young American Women in the 1970s (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982). Sharlene Hesse-Biber, et al. Working Women in America: Split

Dreams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Sara Nelson, ed., "Full Employment and the Economy," Do It NOW 9.11 (1976):1.

[728] There are numerous examples of how the Afro's symbolism for racial pride and progressive thinking has diminished and in some instances is marked as funny and is mocked in films. For instance, in the 1970s popular exploitation films such as "Foxy Brown" and "Coffy" heroine Pam Grier hides guns and knives in her large Afro. Later, in the 1990s the Afro is again uses as a comic foil when rapper turned actor pulls out a bat from his large Afro in the film "Leprechaun in the Hood." See Encyclopedia of Pop Culture: Diane Carol Bailey, Angelo P. Thrower, Basic Care for Naturally Textured Hair: Cultivating Curly, Coily, and Kinky Hair (Delmar Thomson Learning, 2001) 4.

[729] Boyd 21. Also exploring this point is Herman Gray in his essay: "Television, Black Americans and he American Dream." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 6 (1989): 376-386. See Herman Gray, Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness" (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 89.

[730] While the show does not tackle the subject of race and racism weekly there were moments during the series where race and racism were considered. One rare, but standout example occurs when Cosby's television wife Claire Huxtable, an attorney, appears on an early morning talk show with three cantankerous intellectuals where she is repeatedly dismissed by the trio, who eventually informed her that she is present to speak to the issue of race and gender.

[731] Herman Gray, Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness" (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 101.

[732] The show examined issues of sexual harassment, apartheid, violence against women, and of course intersectional politics. Gray 102.

[733] We will see this reflected in a few shows that came after "A Different World" most notably the African American sitcom "Living Single" (1993). Most shows on syndicated or cable television showcased African American women of various hues, but maintained the long and straight hair aesthetic. For example, the Showtime series "Linc's" (1998), "Moesha" (1996--Brandy alternated between very long thin braids and a long weave),"Girlfriends" (2000) ,"My Wife and Kids", (2001)and "Eve"(2003) have African American female characters with long and straight, curly and long, and/or long blonde hair.

[734] One of the women I interviewed for my master thesis worked at Arthur Anderson and had chemically straightened hair. She revealed that the other African American woman that worked in the firm came in one day without the scarf she wore to cover her growing dreadlocks and her hair was discussed incessantly. Later, she was mocked and her hairstyle was labeled a 'monstrosity' behind her back by her white peers. It is my contention that the African American woman has been viewed as problematic and grotesque since she arrived in the New World. So, regardless of what she does with her hair (nappy or straight) she is still viewed as monstrous in the eyes of the world because she is of African descent and female. In fact, her body is viewed as ugly and grotesque because it is the opposite of the "classical body" which is read a white. The grotesque exists in a dialectical relationship with the classical (read: the beautiful and white). Furthermore Rosi Braidotti contends: The monster is the bodily incarnation of

difference from the basic human norm; it is a deviant, an anomaly. Braidotti continues, "the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of fascination and horror". See Rosi Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory, eds., Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 62-65. Finally, African American Nathalie Goodwin of Houston Texas who in 1997 used to wear braids while working as a financial division for a health care company returned from a Jamaican vacation wearing breads and was ignored by her boss and was not introduced when people came to their office. However, when she removed the braids her boss began speaking to her again and they all began to treat her kindly as they had before she got braids. She thought without the braids she was "the acceptable, non-threatening black person they thought they had hired." Chicago Tribune. July 15, 2001. Section 6, 7.

[735] In fact, "Soul Food" was written, directed, and produced almost exclusively by African Americans like Salim Akil, Kevin Arkadie, Eriq La Salle, Tracey Edmonds and Felicia D. Henderson.

[736] This episode aired March 24, 2004 on Showtime.

[737] The show seems to flirt with an attraction between Ahmad and his thin rich white female blonde classmate, Callie played by Tamara Hope.

[738] Ovetta Wiggins, "Last Call for "Soul Food": Showtime's Black-Cast Drama Had Hearty Helping of Reality" Washington Post May 26, 2004. C01.

[739] James T. Stewart, "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist," in Black Fire, 7.

[740] See Kimberly W. Benston, Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism (New York: Routledge, 2000) 120.

[741] Gussie L. Davis, "When They Straighten All the Colored People's Hair," Remember That Song 3 (1983): 8-9.

[742] Stanley J Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920," American Quarterly 29.1 (1997):102-116.

[743]Ecclesiastes 7:13; "You shall not make straight what God has made crooked." The New American Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1970) John 9:1-13, 28-38. See Carolivia Herron, Nappy Hair (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997).

[744]James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: The Hidden transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[745] Scott 173.

[746] Paul Oliver, Screening the Blues: Aspects of the Blues Tradition (New York: Da Capo, 1968) 179.

[747] See Stuart Hall, "What is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture? Gina Dent ed., Black Popular Culture (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992) 30.

[748] Antinio Gramsci contends in that songs are popular if the conception of the world is contradicts the "official" status of the world. See Antinio Gramsci, Selections from Cultural Writings, editor David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 195.

[749] According to Langston Hughes jazz is one of the intrinsic expressions of African American life in America. See Nathan Irvin Huggins, ed., Voices from the Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 309.

[750] Stallybrass and White 3.

[751] Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds., Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 1036.

[752] Davis 196.

[753] Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 1989) 73.

[754] Davis 122.

[755] Davis 121.

[756]Robin D.G. Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles," Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple Univ. Press, 1996) 121.

[757] Aretha Franklin, Greatest Hits (1980-1994) Arista, 1994.

[758] bell hooks, Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies (New York: Routledge, 1996) 111.

[759] In an interview Badu states that her (Islamic) name loosely translated, means "to manifest the truth, " wishes to speak truth about the issues she sings about. See Badu, Erykah. Interview. "Home Brew." Joy Bennett Kinnon. Ebony July 1997: 5-7.

[760] The process that some African Americans take issue with because they think it is an attempt to produce straight hair that resembles that of whites, however Nelson George argues that the process and conk that was worn by some African American (typically men) was for some not about replicating whiteness. In fact, George asserts that pop icon Elvis Presley put Pomade in his hair to emulate the African American men's hair who was in turn trying to emulate 'white folks' hair. See Nelson George, The Death of Rhythm and Blues (New York: Pantheon, 1988) 62.

[761] Joy Bennett Kinnon "Erykah Badu: On her Career and her Romance with Common." Ebony. September 2003:32.

[762] Lauryn Hill, Miseducation of Lauryn Hill. Sony, 1998.

[763] India Arie, Testimony. Motown. 2006.

[764] Brett Johnson, "There's Something About India.Arie." Essence June 2006:84.

[765] Michael Eric Dyson, Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2001) 22.

[766] James Baldwin, "Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption," Views on Black American Music, 2 (1984-85):12.

[767] Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 40.

CONCLUSION

"It is useless for us any longer to sit with our hands folded, reproaching the whites: for that will never elevate us."[768]

This dissertation has examined the various ways many African American women (re) conceptualize and perform their identities through changing the fixed societal notions about African American hair and challenge racist and sexist ideologies that have been inscribed on their bodies from the colonial age to the present. The significance of this study is that it illuminates how hair is used as a means of empowerment in the texts of many African American women—in their efforts to (re)define and perform as an autonomous identity. By (re)thinking their hair some African American women are able to move away from the confines of racist and sexist (mis)representations of their hair that have plagued African American women since their arrival in the New World. Thus, this study serves as a means of explicating selected texts as a counter discourse that disrupts the idea that their hair----and in broader terms—their bodies--are unsightly and needs to be altered in an effort to comply with a white female normative beauty and identity standard. Indeed, this study has revealed via the diverse (re)representations in selected texts that hair is used to explore, expressively, and creatively depict African American women's identity performances. The elucidation of these cultural productions in this study illustrates these performances of identity via hair to underscore the argument that identity---all identity is a fluid performance, rather than static. In this sense, this dissertation extends previous studies on hair and identity politics by also disrupting the notion that identity is static. Also important is how some African American women show via discussions on hair and identity politics and performances that their identities extend

beyond the category of race, thereby emphasizing the significance of intersectional politics. In this manner, African American women do not deem race as more important in their identity performances than gender, sexuality, and class. Thus, such considerations, as this study highlights, liberate many African American women from restrictive societal racial and gendered roles and identity performances, producing transgressive identity performances such as those of Alice Walker's Celie and Shug in The Color Purple.

Hopefully, this dissertation has shown how the texts by African American women underscore Maria Stewart's contention that: "It is useless for us any longer to sit with our hands folded, reproaching the whites; for that will never elevate us." The selections in this study utilize hair to "elevate" the images and identity performances of African American women and to refuse to accept derogatory ideas about their identities by (re)claiming their hair/bodies in their own work. Chapter 2 interrogated how hair in Harriet Wilson's Our Nig and Harriet Jacobs's Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl function as tropes for race, class, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, this study illuminates how hair has been used to allow these African American women to (re)conceptualize and perform their identity even while enslaved. Chapters 3 and 4 also examine how hair serves as a signifier of race, class, gender, femininity, and sexuality. It also explores how these texts disrupt both stereotypical notions of women's identity and a hegemonic world view of some African American women's identities. Chapter 5 analyzes how some African American female filmmakers use their films as conduct text to teach others how to read African American women's hair on film and show how African American women might/should perform an aspect of their identity. Finally, chapter six examines how popular culture serves as a space for some African American

women to redress the role that the ideology of whiteness has played imposing identity performances onto African American women vis-à-vis their hair.

While this study focuses on African American women, future research might consider the observations of African American men on African American women's hair and identity politics and performances. Future studies might also examine whether or not other Black women in other countries use hair as an aspect of their identity performance. Additionally, future scholarship might examine the impact of television, such as "That's So Raven" and "The Proud Family," situate African Americans with light skin and long straight hair as heroines and their disagreeable side kick or nemesis with short hair or braids. Future research might "read" such television shows to consider how young African American girls read hair as a text and influence how they construct and perform identity. Such a study could critically examine the attitudes, behavior, concerns, feelings, and perceptions these young girls have about their hair and the hair (re)presentations that they see in popular culture.

Potential research studies might explore how some African American men use their hair as a means of performing and (re)constructing their identities. For example, what does the African American man's hair say about his identity politics and performance? Is his identity performance taken seriously? What does his performance say about agency and self-determination? What, if any, is the price of his performance? Is he penalized in any way for wearing his hair long? What does his long straight hair say about why this type of hair has been largely representative of a certain kind of gender performance? This study does not answer these questions; a surface reading might suggest that African American men's hair is acceptable in the arts; and for some typically

expressive areas of employment. Still another surface reading might propose that the African American man in the suit with his long feminine "looking" hair might suffer from Gender Identity Disease, or represent a transsexual/transgendered individual. At the very least, in African American men, long hair conveys a conscious and multifaceted identity performance.

A study on African American men's hair politics and poetics might include exploring such works as The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Michelle Cliff's No Telephone to Heaven, or Randall Kenan's A Visitation of Spirits for a consideration of how some African American men or individuals within the Black Diaspora have used hair to (re)conceptualize their notions of identity. Particular focus might be devoted to the significance of the barbershops and/or hair salons and African American men's (heterosexual, homosexual, transgendered, etc) hairstyles and how these hair styles impact their access to resources in society.

NOTES

[768] Marilyn Richardson, ed., Maria Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 53.

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